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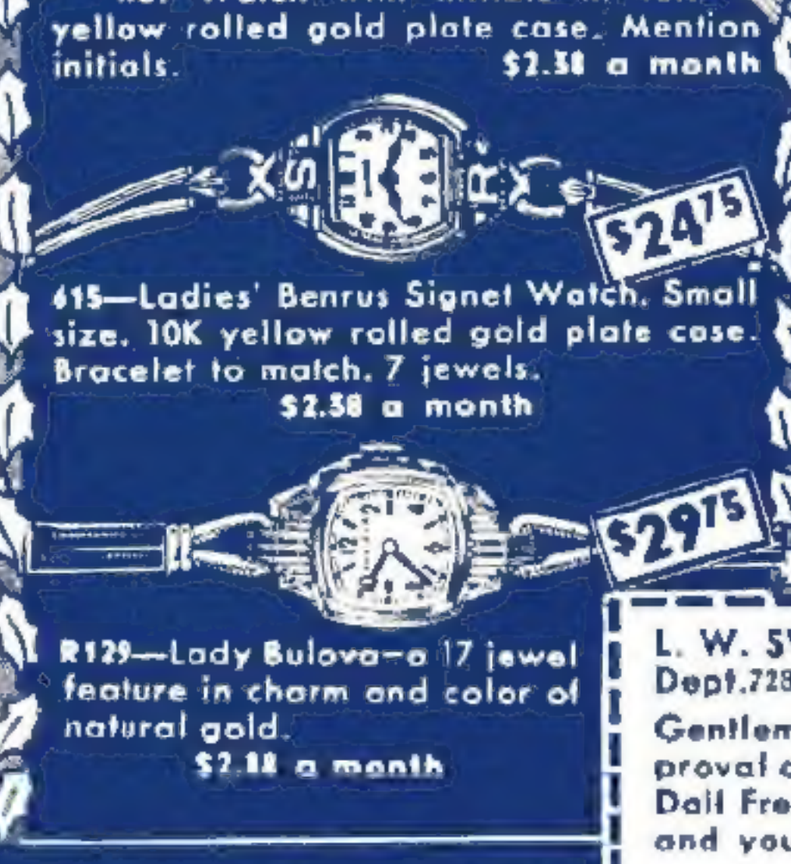

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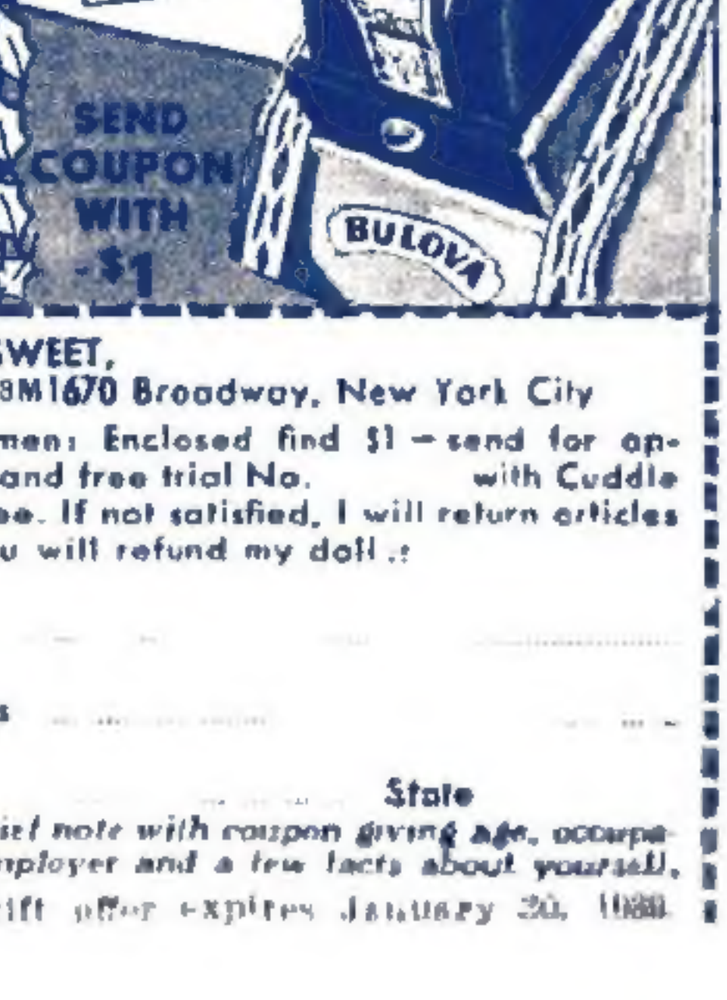

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❸ "The lad at the tiller didn't know how to bring the ship about, and although he would wake Larry, they'd be too far away to ever find me in that roaring darkness.

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A Tribute to the Late

STANLEY G. WEINBAUM

Author of "The Black Flame"

By

OTTO BINDER

Popular Author of Many Science Fiction Novels and Stories

Stanley G. Weinbaum

A *MARTIAN ODYSSEY*, his first science fiction story, brought Stanley G. Weinbaum instant recognition. Who can forget the amazing, lovable "Twe-e-r-r-rl"? It was only the first of many fascinating creatures of other worlds—master-mind Oscar of the Lotus-Eaters, the pathetically dumb Loonies, the demoniac Trioptes . . . He brought them to life with a deft, masterful touch.

His human characters were lifelike and colorful—Van Manderpootz, acid-tongued and *so* modest, Dixon Wells, always late and always sorry, the Red Peri, Queen of the Spaceways, and others.

Weinbaum wove these creatures and characters into story situations that held suspense from the first to the last word.

It is amazing to me, as an author, how Weinbaum could produce, in steady succession, stories of such excellent composition and originality. *Worlds of If* was, and perhaps still is, the best exposition to date of the multiple-universe idea. *Circle of Zero* breathed the true, chilling atmosphere of the "unending-world" theory. His *Brink of Infinity* was the only story that ever made pure, dry mathematics an engrossing theme.

A MODEL OF SIMPLICITY

Weinbaum's style of writing has been a model of simplicity and sincerity never since duplicated by other authors in our field. If story-telling is a "gift," Weinbaum had it. I believe, personally, that if he had lived, he would eventually have earned a place alongside such masters of fantasy as Verne, Wells, Merritt and Burroughs.

One had only to meet Weinbaum to appreciate why he wrote good stories. I visited him in Milwaukee, one summer's day, and passed one of the most interesting afternoons of my life. His reading knowledge of science was tremendous and up-to-date. His fund of new story-ideas seemed exhaustless. His imagination was powerful.

UNBOUNDED ENTHUSIASM

But most of all, Weinbaum had an unbounded enthusiasm for science fiction. In the last analysis, I think it is that quality that shines through his work and gives it its inimitable appeal. Weinbaum honestly put his heart and soul into his writing. He was not above a little satire at times, but always with a core of sincerity behind it all.

We talked of many things that afternoon, but particularly of the future of science fiction.

Weinbaum predicted that science fiction would or should soon pass out of its phase of stilted "classical" form, and into a phase stressing human interest and realistic style of presentation. He has been right. Weinbaum himself was not the least of the forces that molded this change for the better in science fiction.

A REAL LOSS

Weinbaum's death was a real loss to science fiction. He had set a pace that made the rest of us writers sit up and take notice. He was leading the way to new, untouched heights in creativeness. And science fiction benefited.

It is a fitting commentary on Weinbaum's work that, three years after his death, his writings are still being published.

I feel that the editors of STARTLING STORIES are paying a fine tribute to his memory in presenting this story, "The Black Flame."

It comes close, in my opinion, to being the "masterpiece" of Weinbaum's facile pen.

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YOU CERTAINLY KNOW RADIO. MINE NEVER SOUNDED BETTER.
I'VE BEEN STUDYING RADIO ONLY A FEW MONTHS AND I'M ALREADY MAKING GOOD MONEY IN MY SPARE TIME
THANKS
OH BILL! I'M SO PROUD OF YOU. YOU'VE GONE AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO
YES! I'VE GOT A GOOD JOB NOW AND A REAL FUTURE, THANKS TO N.R.I. TRAINING
TOM SAID "NO" HE'S STILL WAITING FOR "LUCK"
BILL'S A SAP TO WASTE HIS TIME STUDYING RADIO AT HOME
SAME OLD GRIND -- SAME SKINNY PAY ENVELOPE -- I'M JUST WHERE I WAS FIVE YEARS AGO
GUESS I'M A FAILURE, LOOKS LIKE I'LL NEVER GET ANYWHERE
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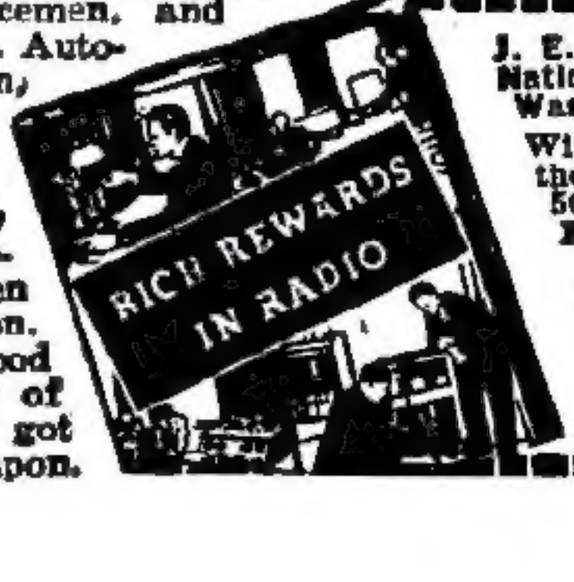

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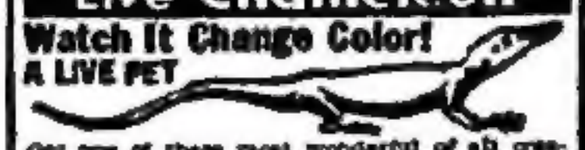

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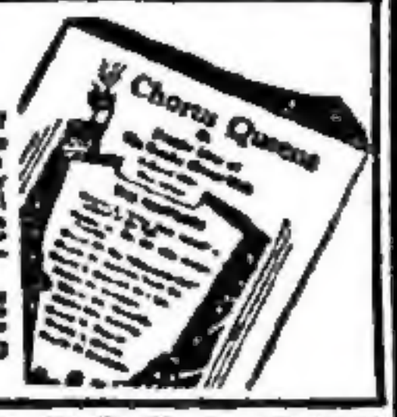

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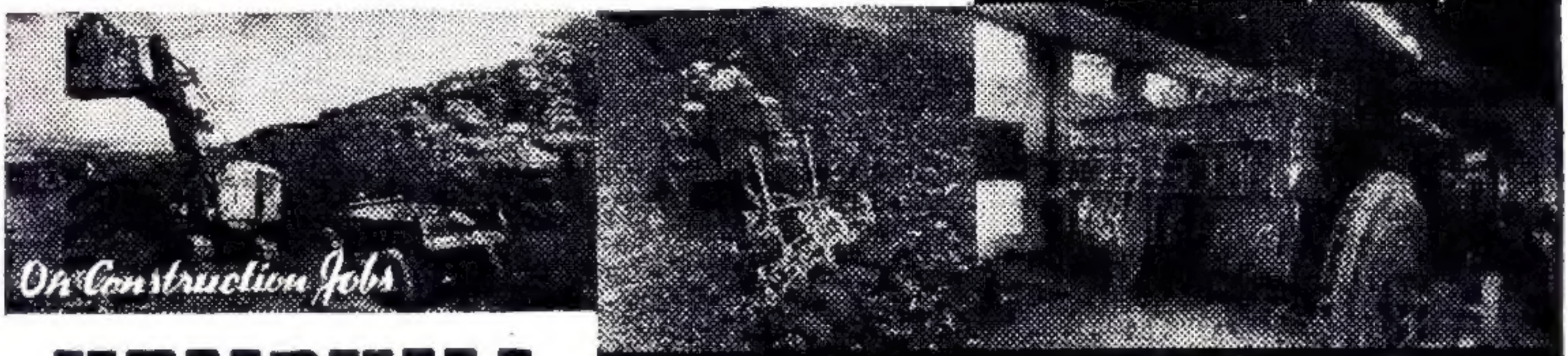

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The next issue of STARTLING STORIES will also present a galaxy of special features. A brand-new scientific crossword puzzle . . . More thumbnail biographies in THRILLS IN SCIENCE . . . the life of Madame Curie in pictures . . . another memorable masterpiece nominated for SCIENTIFICTION'S HALL OF FAME, plus other features.

* * *

In forthcoming issues of STARTLING STORIES we plan to publish outstanding short stories by your favorite writers. Edmond Hamilton, Manly Wade Wellman, L. A. Eshbach, Otis A. Kline, Henry Kuttner and many others are among the top-notchers who will be represented.

* * *

There's a special treat coming up in the February issue of our companion science fiction magazine, THRILLING WONDER STORIES. Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr., has written a dynamic novelet of secret forces, THE TELEPATHIC TOMB, which belongs among scientifiction's best.

Every issue of T.W.S. contains many short stories by such popular science fiction authors as Arthur J. Burks, Ray Cummings, Ralph Milne Farley, Arthur K. Barnes, Clifford D. Simak, Paul Ernst, Frank B. Long, Jr., and others.

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REVIEWING THE SCIENCE FICTION FAN PUBLICATIONS

TOMORROW. 20 Hollin Park Road, Roundhay, England. Edited by Douglas W. F. Mayer and G. A. Airey.

TOMORROW, an English publication devoted to the interests of science fiction fans, offers the best magazine in this field. Its latest number includes articles on published science fiction, both American and foreign; a feature, INTERPLANETARY PARADE, by P. E. Cleator, which is an article on rocket news; an article on "The Future of Applied Psychology," by Geoffrey Daniels; an interview with Walter H. Gillings, Editor of the English science fiction magazine, TALES OF WONDER. There are numerous other articles contained in this, the Spring, 1938 issue. The magazine has an attractive format and is profusely illustrated. For further information query the editor at address given above.

* * *

IMAGINATION. Box 6475 Metropolitan Station, Los Angeles, California. Edited by the Los Angeles Chapter of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE.

IMAGINATION, although mimeographed, presents an interesting collection of science fiction fan features and articles in each issue. The September, 1938 issue contains scientifiction book reviews, a humorous article by Henry Kuttner, a chatter column by Julius Schwartz on the latest news in the fan world, and an editorial by Charles D. Hornig. Magazine regularly carries autographs of science fiction authors, runs interesting letters from fans, and various other newsy tidbits pertaining to fantasy fiction and its authors and editors. Calls itself "The Fanmag of the Future With a Future." Query at address above.

* * *

THE SCIENCE FICTION FAN. 2550 Stout Street, Denver, Colorado. Edited by Olon F. Wiggins.

THE SCIENCE FICTION FAN is a hektographed affair, more neatly assembled than its similarly issued contemporaries. The magazine carries candid comment from active fans regarding the policies of the various science fiction fans. Most of the criticism given is caustic, rather than constructive. The second anniversary issue, recently published, carried fifty-two pages, and a wide variety of editorials and gossip columns by Donald A. Wollheim, Sam Moskowitz, Robert W. Lowndes, Jack Speer, J. V. Taurasi, Dale Hart, Louis Kuslan, Roy A. Squires, Robert Bahr, Nils H. Frome, Lane Stannard, and others. General tempo of magazine is one of enthusiasm, and its energetic contributors should help improve mag. Carries helpful hints for magazine collectors, inside dope on future line-ups of the regular magazines, and in general takes reader behind the scenes in science fiction. Could be more accurate as to information contained. Query at address above.

FANTASY-NEWS. 137-07 32nd Avenue, Flushing, New York. Edited by James V. Taurasi.

FANTASY-NEWS is a two-page mimeographed sheet that is issued weekly, and which manages to compress in its dual pages the latest happenings in the science fiction world. If it's news about a forthcoming fantastic movie, or information about the revival of some old scientifilm, or notes about some futuristic radio skit—you'll find it in FANTASY-NEWS. Editor telescopes and microscopes the nation's press, dishing out notes about forthcoming fantastic books, national magazines publishing an occasional science fiction tale, etc. If you want to keep posted on such trivia, query at address above for additional information. Mag should be linotyped and carry more wordage. Editor does a good job.

* * *

NEW FANDOM. 603 So. 11th St., Newark, N. J. Edited by Sam Moskowitz, William S. Sykora, Raymond Van Houten and James V. Taurasi.

NEW FANDOM is the newest and latest of the fan magazine crop. The initial issue, mimeographed neatly, carries articles by its editors and Claire P. Beck, Roy A. Squires, and others. Magazine features typical fan articles and departments, and announces a contest for best letters on what reader thinks of science fiction.

(Note.—From time to time we will include reviews of other well-known fan magazines. Watch for a more complete report in the next issue of STARTLING STORIES.—Ed.)

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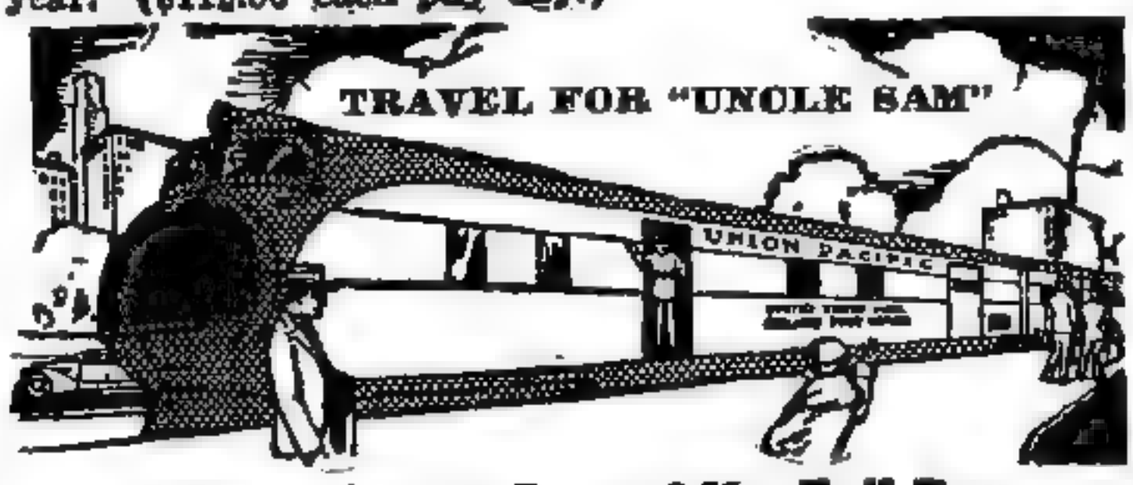

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Vol. 1, No. 1 STARTLING STORIES January, 1939

Prophets of Science

A Guest Editorial

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

WELL-KNOWN SCIENTIFICTION NOVELIST

PREVISION, or prophecy, is older than civilization.

Every religious faith known to modern man has had its prophets. And the records of their predictions can be found, not only in the Bible, but in the writings of people whose chronicles predate the Scriptures by many thousands of years.

With the rise of the age of science have come the prophets of science—those who predicted that diseases were caused by the attacks of microorganisms and not, as was once believed, by the unwelcome attentions of devils. Those who predicted that man would "fly through the air with the greatest of ease," and were ridiculed and persecuted for their beliefs.

Otis Adelbert Kline

"Darius Green and his Flying Machine" is an example of the ridicule in which this belief was held. It remained for the Wright Brothers to make this dream come true with the first heavier-than-air flying machines.

Many "impossibilities" of two generations ago have become commonplace today. The airplane, the radio and talking pictures are perhaps the most familiar, representing industries in which billions of dollars have been invested. But there are many others.

For example, not quite so well known to the public are the hundreds of practical uses to which the photoelectric cell has been put. It opens and closes doors soundlessly. In the manufacturing world, it inspects machine-made articles with an accuracy and speed impossible to any human being, rejecting those which are imperfect, and passing those which meet the required standards.

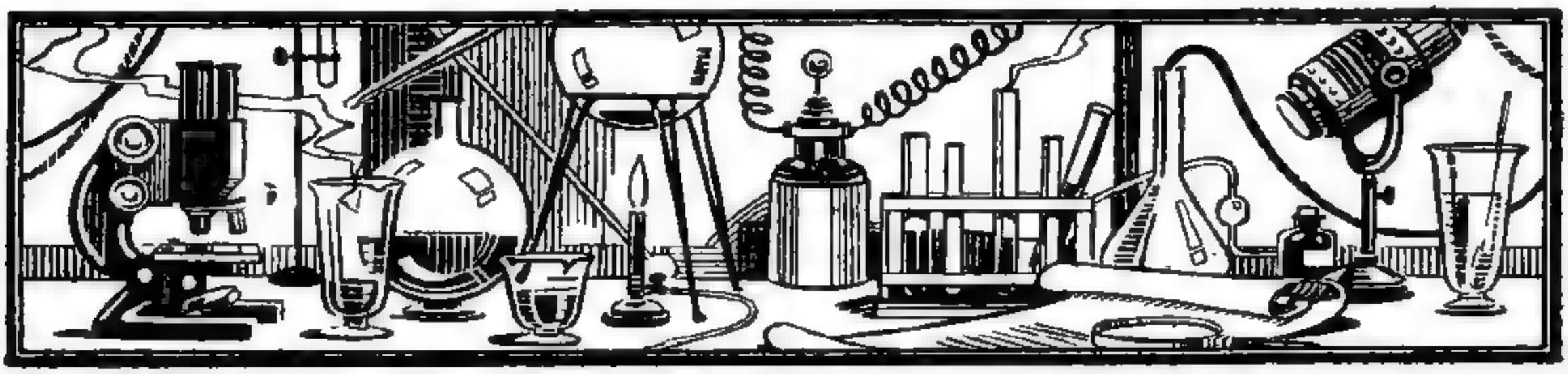
It stops and starts huge machines, punches or prints bus and elevated transfers with the exact date, time and identification numbers, and even detects burglars, calls the police, and sounds an alarm.

To many people who lived two generations and more ago, this would be sheer magic—works of the devil. To many—but not to all.

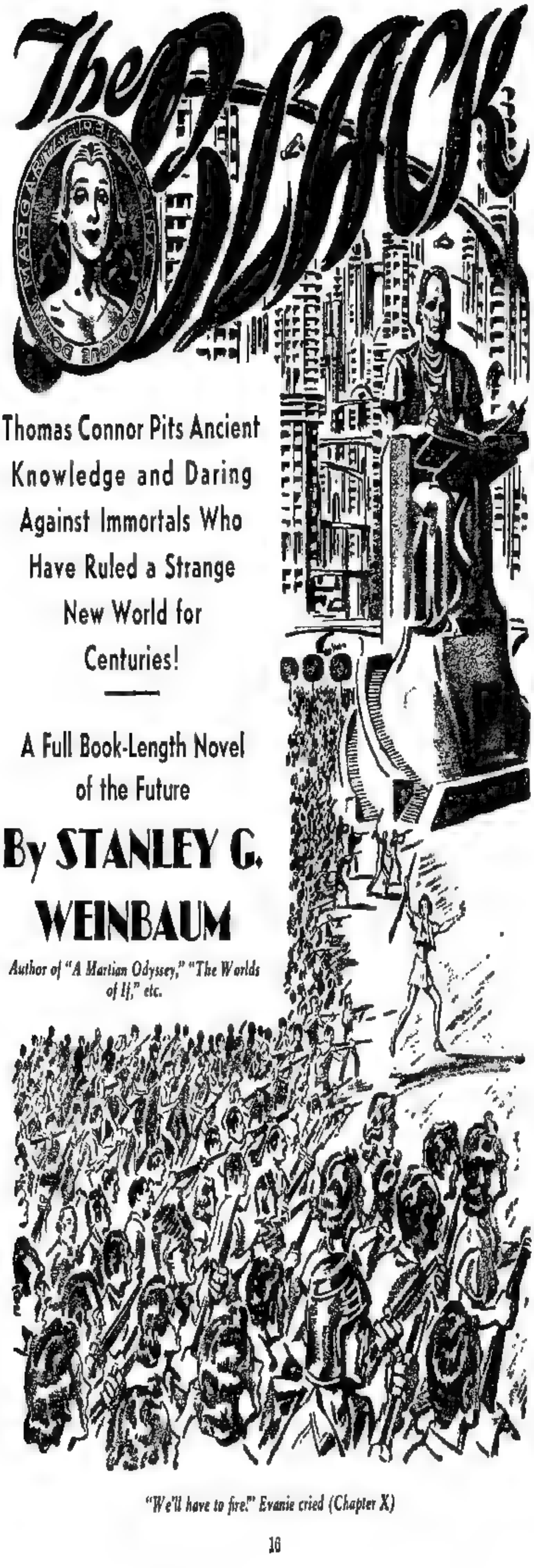
For, with the dawn of the age of science came the prophets of science whose visions carried beyond known facts. Some were inventors and investigators. But others, like Jules Verne and H. G. Wells, wrote science fiction, and predicted with surprising accuracy, many of the wonders that were to come.

A skyscraper must be conceived by the architect before it can be built by the workmen. Imagination, conception, planning, prevision—all these must come first. Without them, no achievement is possible.

The writers whose works you will find in the pages of STARTLING STORIES are prophets of science. A generation or so hence, many of the wonders which they bring you in the form of fiction will be realities.



The BLACK FLAME



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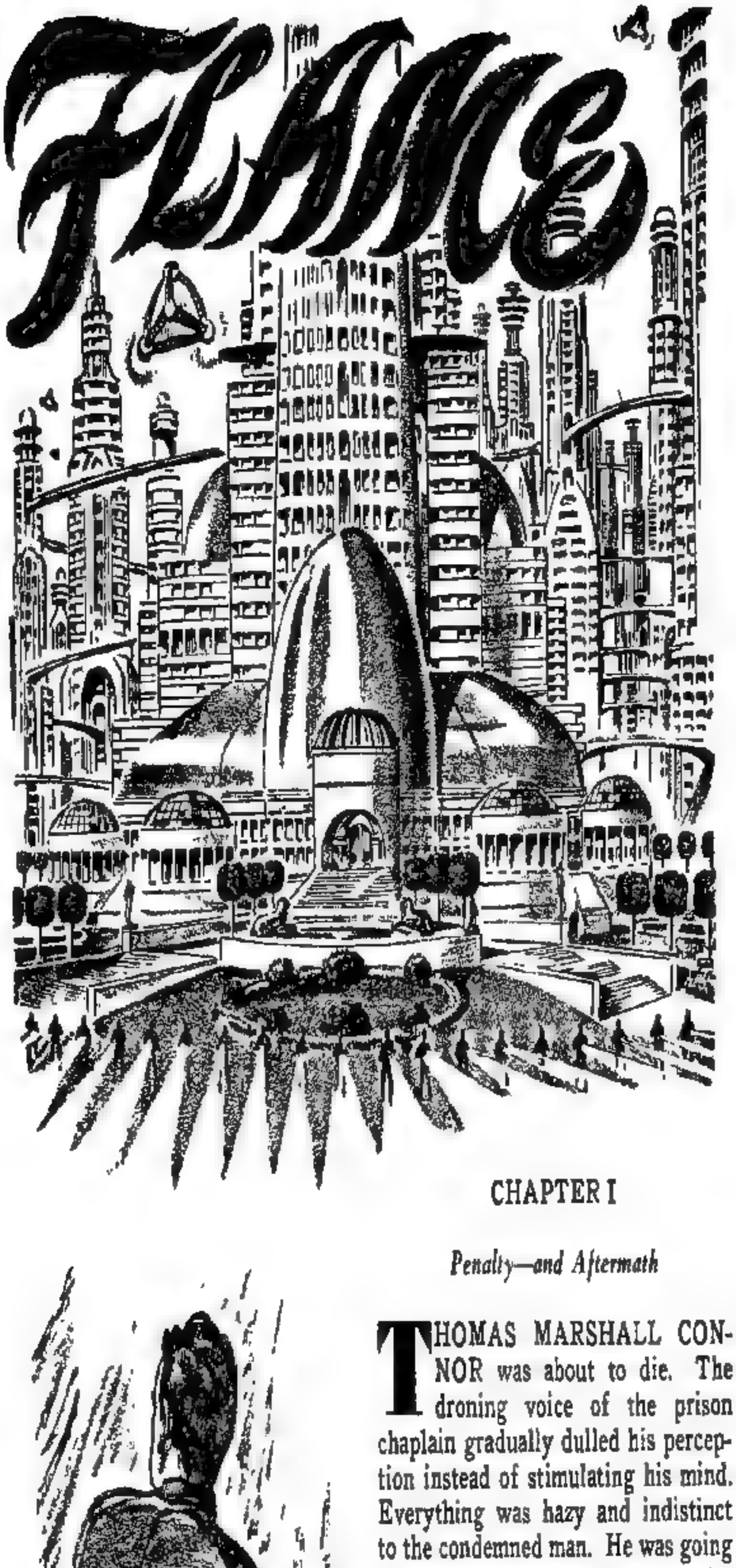


CHAPTER I

Penalty—and Aftermath

THOMAS MARSHALL CONNOR was about to die. The droning voice of the prison chaplain gradually dulled his perception instead of stimulating his mind. Everything was hazy and indistinct to the condemned man. He was going to the electric chair in just ten minutes to pay the supreme penalty because he had accidentally killed a man with his bare fists.

Connor, vibrantly alive, vigorous and healthy, only twenty-six, a brilliant young engineer, was going to die. And, knowing, he did not care. But there was nothing at all nebulous about the gray stone and cold iron bars of the death cell. There was nothing uncertain about the split down his trouser leg and the shaven spot on his head.

The condemned man was acutely

aware of the solidarity of material things about him. The world he was leaving was concrete and substantial. The approaching footsteps of the death guard sounded heavily in the distance.

Then the cell door opened, and the chaplain ceased his murmuring. Passively Thomas Marshall Connor accepted his blessings, and calmly took his position between his guards for his last voluntary walk.

He remained in his state of detachment as they seated him in the chair, strapped his body and fastened the electrodes. He heard the faint rustling of the witnesses and the nervous, rapid scratching of reporters' pencils. He could imagine their adjectives—"Calloused murderer" . . . "Brazenly indifferent to his fate."

But it was as if the matter concerned a third party.

He simply relaxed and waited. To die so quickly and painlessly was more a relief than anything. He was not even aware when the warden gave his signal. There was a sudden silent flash of blue light. And then—nothing at all.

* * * * *

SO this was death. The slow and majestic drifting through the Stygian void, borne on the ageless tides of eternity.

Peace, at last—peace, and quiet, and rest.

But what was this sensation like the glimpse of a faint, faraway light which winked on and off like a star? After an interminable period the light became fixed and steady, a thing of annoyance. Thomas Marshall Connor slowly became aware of the fact of his existence as an entity, in some unknown state. The senses and memories that were his personality struggled weakly to reassemble themselves into a thinking unity of being—and he became conscious of pain and physical torture.

There was a sound of shrill voices, and a stir of fresh air. He became aware of his body again. He lay quiet, inert, exhausted. But not as lifeless as he had lain for—how long?

When the shrill voices sounded again, Connor opened unseeing eyes and stared at the blackness just above him. After a space he began to see, but not to comprehend. The blackness became a jagged, pebbled roof no more than twelve inches from his eyes—rough and unfinished like the under side of a concrete walk.

The light became a glimmer of daylight from a point near his right shoulder.

Another sensation crept into his awareness. He was horribly, bitterly cold. Not with the chill of winter air, but with the terrible frigidity of inter-galactic space. Yet he was on—no, *in*, earth of some sort. It was as if icy water flowed in his veins instead of blood. Yet he felt completely dehydrated. His body was as inert as though detached from his brain, but he was cruelly imprisoned within it. He became conscious of a growing resentment of this fact.

Then, stimulated by the shrilling, piping voices and the patter of tiny feet out there somewhere to the right, he made a tremendous effort to move. There was a dry, withered crackling sound—like the crumpling of old parchment—but indubitably his right arm had lifted!

The exertion left him weak and nauseated. For a time he lay as in a stupor. Then a second effort proved easier. After another timeless interval of struggling torment his legs yielded reluctant obedience to his brain. Again he lay quietly, exhausted, but gathering strength for the supreme effort of bursting from his crypt.

For he knew now where he was. He lay in what remained of his grave. How or why, he did not know. That was to be determined.

With all his weak strength he thrust against the left side of his queer tomb, moving his body against the crevice at his right. Only a thin veil of loose gravel and rubble blocked the way to the open. As his shoulder struck the pile, it gave and slid away, outward and downward, in a miniature avalanche.

Blinding daylight smote Connor like an agony. The shrill voices screamed.

"'S moom!" a child's voice cried tremulously. "'S moom again!"

Connor panted from exertion, and struggled to emerge from his hole, each movement producing another noise like rattling paper. And suddenly he was free! The last of the gravel tinkled away and he rolled abruptly down a small declivity to rest limply at the bottom of the little hillside.

HE saw now that erosion had cut through this burial ground—wherever it was—and had opened a way for him through the side of his grave. His sight was strangely dim, but he became aware of half a dozen little figures in a frightened semicircle beyond him.

Children! Children in strange modernistic garb of bright colors, but nevertheless human children who stared at him with wide-open mouths and popping eyes. Their curiously cherubic faces were set in masks of horrified terror.

Suddenly recalling the terrors he had sometimes known in his own childhood, Connor was surprised they did not flee. He stretched forth an imploring hand and made a desperate effort to speak. This was his first attempt to use his voice, and he found that he could not.

The spell of dread that held the children frozen was instantly broken. One of them gave a dismayed cry:

"A-a-a-h! 'S a specker!"

In panic, shrieking that cry, the entire group turned and fled. They disappeared around the shoulder of the eroded hill, and Connor was left horribly alone. He groaned from the depths of his despair and was conscious of a faint rasping noise through his cracked and parched lips.

He realized suddenly that he was quite naked—his shroud had long since moldered to dust. At the same moment that full comprehension of what this meant came to him, he was gazing in horror at his body. Bones! Nothing but bones, covered with a dirty, parchmentlike skin!

So tightly did his skin cover his skeletal framework that the very structure of the bones showed through. He could see the articulation at knuckles, knees, and toes. And the parchment skin was cracked like an ancient Chinese vase, checked like aged varnish. He was a horror from the tomb, and he nearly fainted at the realization.

After a swooning space, he endeavored to arise. Finding that he could not, he began crawling painfully and laboriously toward a puddle of water from the last rain. Reaching it, he leaned over to place his lips against its surface, reckless of its potability, and sucked in the liquid until a vast roaring filled his ears.

The moment of dizziness passed. He felt somewhat better, and his breathing rasped a bit less painfully in his moistened throat. His eyesight was slowly clearing and, as he leaned above the little pool, he glimpsed the specter reflected there. It looked like a skull—a face with lips shrunken away from the teeth, so fleshless that it might have been a death's head.

"Oh, God!" he called out aloud, and his voice croaked like that of a sick raven. "What and where am I!"

In the back of his mind all through this weird experience, there had been a sense of something strange aside from his emergence from a tomb in the form of a living scarecrow. He stared up at the sky.

THE vault of heaven was blue and fleecy with the whitest of clouds. The sun was shining as he had never thought to see it shine again. The grass was green. The ground was normally earthy. Everything was as it should be—but there was a strangeness about it that frightened him. Instinctively he knew that something was direfully amiss.

It was not the fact that he failed to recognize his surroundings. He had not had the strength to explore; neither did he know where he had been buried. It was that indefinable homing instinct possessed in varying degree by all animate things. That

Evanie Sair

instinct was out of gear. His time sense had stopped with the throwing of that electric switch—how long ago? Somehow, lying there under the warming rays of the sun, he felt like an alien presence in a strange country.

"Lost!" he whimpered like a child.

After a long space in which he remained in a sort of stupor, he became aware of the sound of footsteps. Dully he looked up. A group of men, led by one of the children, was advancing slowly toward him. They wore brightly colored shirts — red, blue, violet—and queer baggy trousers gathered at the ankles in an exotic style.

With a desperate burst of energy, Connor gained his knees. He extended a pleading, skeletonlike claw.

"Help me!" he croaked in his hoarse whisper.

The beardless, queerly effeminate-looking men halted and stared at him in horror.

"'Assim!" shrilled the child's voice. "'S a specker. 'S dead."

One of the men stepped forward, looking from Connor to the gaping hole in the hillside.

"Wassup?" he questioned.

Connor could only repeat his croaking plea for aid.

"'Esick," spoke another man gravely. "Sleeper, eh?"

There was a murmur of consultation among the men with the bright clothes and oddly soft, womanlike voices.

"T' Evanie!" decided one. "T' Evanie, the Sorc'ess."

They closed quickly around the half reclining Connor and lifted him gently. He was conscious of being borne along the curving cut to a yellow country road, and then black oblivion descended once more to claim him.

When he regained consciousness the next time, he found that he was within walls, reclining on a soft bed of some kind. He had a vague dreamy impression of a girlish face with bronze hair and features like Raphael's angels bending over him. Something warm and sweetish, like glycerin, trickled down his throat.

Then, to the whispered accompaniment of that queerly slurred English speech, he sank into the blissful repose of deep sleep.

CHAPTER II

Evanie the Sorceress

THERE were successive intervals of dream and oblivion, of racking pain and terrible nauseating weakness; of voices murmuring queer, unintelligible words that yet were elusively familiar.

Then one day he awoke to the consciousness of a summer morning. Birds twittered; in the distance children shouted. Clear of mind at last, he lay on a cushioned couch puzzling over his whereabouts, even his identity, for nothing within his vision indicated where or who he was.

The first thing that caught his attention was his own right hand. Paper-thin, incredibly bony, it lay like the hand of death on the rosy coverlet, so transparent that the very color shone through. He could not raise it; only a twitching of the horrible fingers attested its union with his body.

The room itself was utterly unfa-

miliar in its almost magnificently simple furnishings. There were neither pictures nor ornaments. Only several chairs of aluminumlike metal, a gleaming silvery table holding a few ragged old volumes, a massive cabinet against the opposite wall, and a chandelier pendant by a chain from the ceiling.

He tried to call out. A faint croak issued.

The response was startlingly immediate. A soft voice said, "Hahya?" in his ear and he turned his head painfully to face the girl of the bronze hair, seated at his side. She smiled gently.

She was dressed in curious green baggy trousers gathered at the ankle, and a brilliant green shirt. She had rolled the full sleeves to her shoulders. Hers was like the costume of the men who had brought him here.

"Whahya?" she said softly.

He understood.

"Oh! I'm—uh—Thomas Connor, of course."

"Thomas Connor o'Course?" she echoed.

He smiled feebly.

"No. Just Thomas Connor."

"F'm 'ere?"

"From St. Louis."

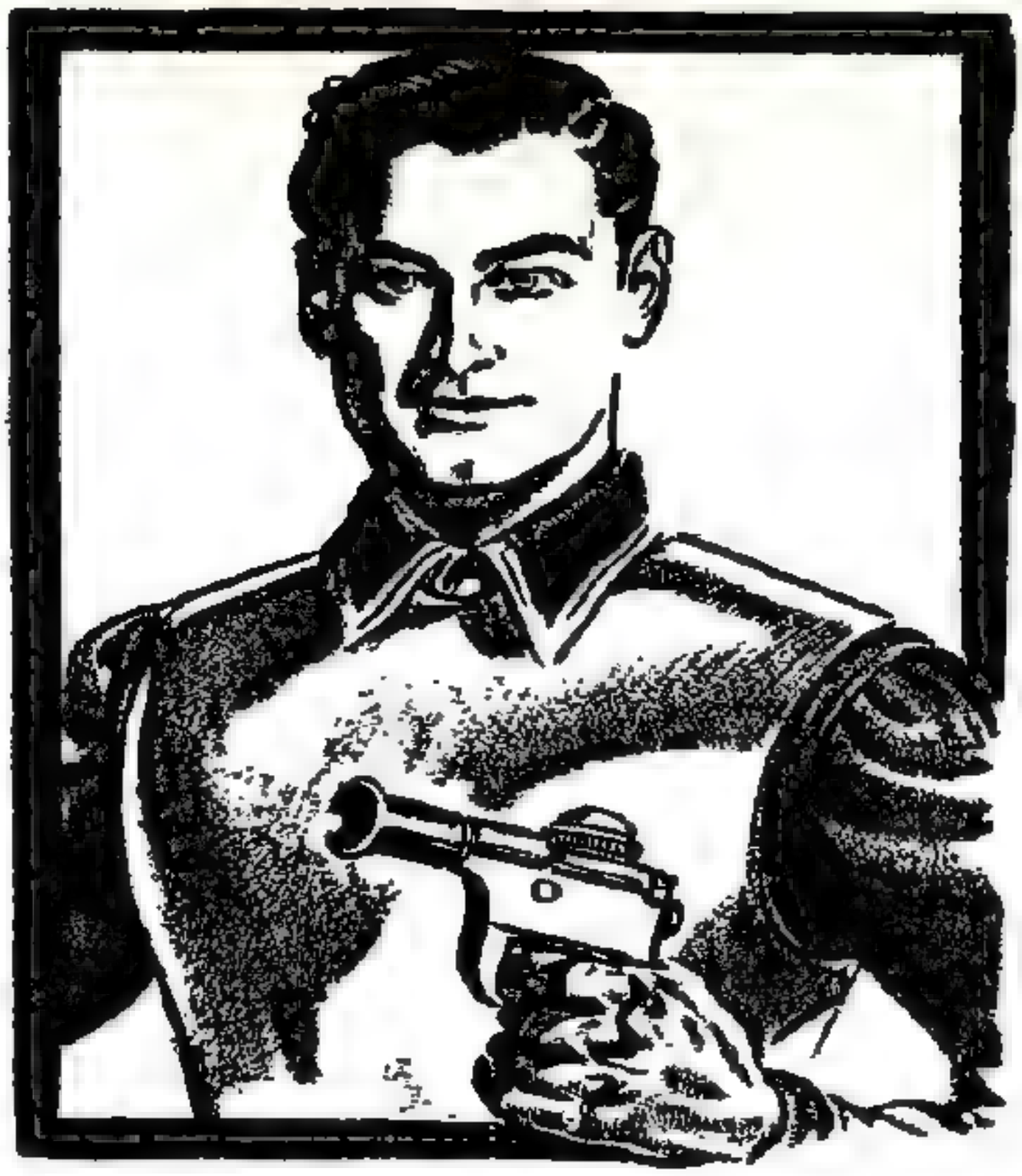
"Selui? 'S far off."

Far off? Then where was he? Suddenly a fragment of memory returned. The trial—Ruth—that catastrophic episode of the grim chair. Ruth! The yellow-haired girl he had once adored, who was to have been his wife—the girl who had coldly sworn his life away because he had killed the man she loved.

Dimly memory came back of how he had found her in that other man's arms on the very eve of their wedding; of his bitter realization that the man he had called friend had stolen Ruth from him. His outraged passions had flamed, the fire had blinded him, and when the ensuing battle had ended, the man had been crumpled on the green sward of the terrace, with a broken neck.

He had been electrocuted for that. He had been strapped in that chair!

Then—then the niche on the hill.



Thomas Connor

But how—how? Had he by some miracle survived the burning current? He must have—and he still had the penalty to pay!

He tried desperately to rise.

"Must leave here!" he muttered. "Get away—must get away." A new thought. "No! I'm legally dead. They can't touch me now; no double jeopardy in this country. I'm safe!"

VOICES sounded in the next room, discussing him.

"F'm Selui, he say," said a man's voice. "Longo, too."

"Eah," said another. "'S lucky to live—lucky! 'L be rich."

That meant nothing to him. He raised his hand with a great effort; it glistened in the light with an oil of some sort. It was no longer cracked, and the ghost of a layer of tissue softened the bones. His flesh was growing back.

His throat felt dry. He drew a breath that ended in a tickling cough.

"Could I have some water?" he asked the girl.

"N-n-n!" She shook her head. "N' water. S'm licket?"

"Licket?" Must be liquid, he reflected. He nodded, and drank the mug of thick fluid she held to his lips.

He grinned his thanks, and she sat beside him. He wondered what sort of colony was this into which he had fallen—with their exotic dress and queer, clipped English.

His eyes wandered appreciatively over his companion; even if she *were* some sort of foreigner, she was gloriously beautiful, with her bronze hair gleaming above the emerald costume.

"C'n talk," she said finally as if in permission.

He accepted. "What's your name?"

"'M Evanie Sair. Evanie the Sorc'ess."

"Evanie the Sorceress!" he echoed. "Pretty name—Evanie. Why the Sorceress, though? Do you tell fortunes?"

The question puzzled her.

"N'onstan," she murmured.

"I mean—what do you do?"

"Sorc'y." At his mystified look, she amplified it. "To give strength—to make well." She touched his fleshless arm.

"But that's medicine—a science. Not sorcery."

"Eah. Science—sorc'y. 'S all one. My father, Evan Sair the Wizard, taught me." Her face shadowed. "'S dead now." Then, abruptly: "Whe's your money?" she asked.

He stared. "Why—in St. Louis. In a bank."

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "N-n-n! Selui! N'safe!"

"Why not?" He started. "Has there been another flood of bank-bustings?"

The girl looked puzzled.

"N'safe," she reiterated. "Urbs is better. For very long, Urbs is better." She paused. "When'd you sleep?"

"Why, last night."

"N-n-n. The long sleep."

The long sleep! It struck him with stunning force that his last memories before that terrible awakening had been of a September world—and this was mid-summer! A horror gripped him. How long—*how long*—had he lain in his—grave? Weeks? No—months, at least.

He shuddered as the girl repeated gently, "When?"

"In September," he muttered.

"What year?"

Surprise strengthened him. "Year? Nineteen thirty-eight, of course!"

She rose suddenly. "'S no Nineteen thirty-eight. 'S only Eight forty-six now!"

THEN she was gone, nor on her return would she permit him to talk. The day vanished; he slept, and another day dawned and passed. Still Evanie Sair refused to allow him to talk again, and the succeeding days found him fuming and puzzled. Little by little, however, her strange clipped English became familiar.

So he lay thinking of his situation, his remarkable escape, the miracle that had somehow softened the discharge of Missouri's generators. And he strengthened. A day came when Evanie again permitted speech, while he watched her preparing his food.

"Y'onger, Tom?" she asked gently. "'L bea soon." He understood; she was saying, "Are you hungry, Tom? I'll be there soon."

He answered with her own affirmative "Eah," and watched her place the meal in a miraculous cook stove that could be trusted to prepare it without burning.

"Evanie," he began, "how long have I been here?"

"Three months," said Evanie. "You were very sick."

"But how long was I asleep?"

"You ought to know," retorted Evanie. "I told you this was Eight forty-six."

He frowned.

"The year Eight forty-six of what?"

"Just Eight forty-six," Evanie said matter of factly. "Of the Enlightenment, of course. What year did you sleep?"

"I told you—Nineteen thirty-eight," insisted Connor, perplexed. "Nineteen thirty-eight. A.D."

"Oh," said Evanie, as if humoring a child.

Then, "A.D?" she repeated. "Anno Domini, that means. Year of the Master. But the Master is nowhere near nineteen hundred years old."

Connor was nonplussed. He and Evanie seemed to be talking at cross-

purposes. He calmly started again.

"Listen to me," he said grimly. "Suppose you tell me exactly what you think I am—all about it, just as if I were a—oh, a Martian. In simple words."

"I know what you are," said Evanie. "You're a Sleeper. Often they wake with muddled minds."

"And what," he pursued doggedly, "is a Sleeper?"

Surprisingly Evanie answered that, in a clear, understandable—but most astonishing—way. Almost as astonished herself that Connor should not know the answer to his question.

"A Sleeper," she said simply, and Connor was now able to understand her peculiar clipped speech—the speech of all these people—with comparative ease, "is one of those who undertake electrolepsis. That is, have themselves put to sleep for a long term of years to make money."

"How? By exhibiting themselves?"

"No," she said. "I mean that those who want wealth badly enough, but won't spend years working for it, undertake the Sleep. You must remember that—if you have forgotten so much else. They put their money in the banks organized for the Sleepers. You will remember. They guarantee six percent. You see, don't you? At that rate a Sleeper's money increases three hundred times a century—three hundred units for each one deposited. Six percent doubles their money every twelve years. A thousand becomes a fortune of three hundred thousand, if the Sleeper outlasts a century—and if he lives."

"Fairy tales!" Connor said contemptuously, but now he understood her question about the whereabouts of his money, when he had first awakened. "What institution can guarantee six percent with safety? What could they invest in?"

"They invest in one percent Urban bonds."

"And run at a loss, I suppose!"

"No. Their profits are enormous—from the funds of the nine out of every ten Sleepers who fail to waken!" slowly. "I wish—you would tell me

"So I'm a Sleeper!" Connor said

The Master

the truth."

Evanie gazed anxiously down at him.

"Electrolepsis often muddles one," she murmured.

"I'm *not* muddled!" he yelled. "I want truth, that's all. I want to know the date."

"It's the middle of July, Eight hundred and forty-six," Evanie said patiently.

"The devil it is! Perhaps I slept backward then! I want to know what happened to me."

"Then suppose you tell," Evanie said gently.

"I will!" he cried frantically. "I'm the Thomas Marshall Connor of the newspapers—or don't you read 'em? I'm the man who was tried for murder, and electrocuted. Tom Connor of St. Louis—*St. Louis!* Do you understand?"

EVANIE'S gentle features went suddenly pale.

"St. Louis!" she whispered. "St. Louis—the ancient name of Selui! Before the Dark Centuries—impossible!"

"Not impossible — true," Connor said grimly. "Too painfully true."

"Electrocution!" Evanie whispered awedly. "The Ancients' punishment!"

She stared as if fascinated, then cried excitedly: "Could electrolepsis happen by accident? Could it? But no! A milliampere too much and brain's destroyed; a millivolt too little and asepsis fails. Either way's death—but it has happened if what you are telling is the truth, Tom Connor! You must have experienced the impossible!"

"And what is electrolepsis?" Connor asked, desperately calm.

"It—it's the Sleep!" whispered the tense girl. "Electrical paralysis of the part of the brain before Rolando's Fissure. It's what the Sleepers use, but only for a century, or a very little more. This—this is fantastic! You have slept since before the Dark Centuries! Not less than a thousand years!"

CHAPTER III

Forest Meeting

A WEEK—the third since Connor's awakening to sane thought, had passed. He sat on a carved stone bench before Evanie's cottage and reveled in the burning canopy of stars and copper moon. He was living, if what he had been told was true—and he was forced to believe it now—after untold billions had passed into eternity.

Evanie must have been right. He was convinced by her gentle insistence, by the queer English on every tongue, by a subtle difference in the very world about him. It wasn't the same world—quite.

He sighed contentedly, breathing the cool night air. He had learned much of the new age from Evanie, though much was still mysteriously veiled. Evanie had spoken of the city of Urbs and the Master, but only vaguely. One day he asked her why.

"Because"—she hesitated—"well, because it's best for you to form your own judgments. We—the people around here—are not fond of Urbs and the Immortals, and I would not like to influence you, Tom, for in all truth, it's the partisans of the Master who have the best of it, not his enemies. Urbs is in power; it will probably remain in power long after our lifetimes, since it has ruled for seven centuries."

Connor looked at the gentle Evanie.

"I'm sure," he said, "that your side of the question is mine."

Abruptly she withdrew something from her pocket and passed it to him. He bent over it—a golden disc, a coin. He made out the lettering "10 Units," and the figure of a snake circling a globe, its tail in its mouth.

"The Midgard Serpent," said Evanie. "I don't know why, but that's what it's called."

Connor reversed the coin. There was revealed the embossed portrait of a man's head, whose features, even in miniature, looked cold, austere, powerful. Connor read:

"Orbis Terrarum Imperator Dominusque Urbis."

"Emperor of the World and Master of the City," he translated.

"Yes. That is the Master." Evanie's voice was serious as she took the coin. "This is the money of Urbs. To understand Urbs and the Master you must of course know something of history since your—sleep."

"History?" he repeated.

She nodded. "Since the Dark Centuries. Some day one of our patriarchs will tell you more than I know. For I know little of your mighty ancient world. It seems to us an incredible age, with its vast cities, its fierce nations, its inconceivable teeming populations, its terrific energies and its flaming genius. Great wars, great industries, great art—and then great wars again."

"But you can tell me—" Connor began, a little impatiently. Evanie shook her head.

"Not now," she said quickly. "For now I must hasten to friends who will discuss with me a matter of great moment. Perhaps some day you may learn of that, too."

And she was gone before Tom Connor could say a word to detain her. He was left alone with his thoughts—clashing, devastating thoughts

sometimes, for there was so much to be learned in this strange world into which he had been plunged.

In so many ways it was a strange, new world, Connor thought, as he watched the girl disappear down the road that slanted from her hilltop home to the village. From where he sat on that bench of hewn stone he could glimpse the village at the foot of the hill—a group of buildings, low, of some white stone. All of the structures were classical, with pure Doric columns. Ormon was the name of the village, Evanie had said.

All strange to him. Not only were the people so vastly at variance with those he had known, but the physical world was bewilderingly different.

Gazing beyond the village, and bringing his attention back to the hills and the forests about him, Tom Connor wondered if they, too, would be different.

He had to know.

THE springtime landscape beckoned. Connor's strength had returned to such an extent that he arose from his bench in the sun and headed toward the green of the forest stretching away behind Evanie's home. It was an enchanting prospect he viewed. The trees had the glistening new green of young foliage, and emerald green grass waved in the fields that stretched away down the hillsides and carpeted the plains.

Birds were twittering in the trees as he entered the forest—birds of all varieties, in profusion, with gaily-colored plumage. Their numbers and fearlessness would have surprised Connor had he not remembered something Evanie had told him. Urbs, she had said, had wiped out objectionable stinging insects, flies, corn-worms and the like, centuries ago, and the birds had helped. As had certain parasites that had been bred for the purpose.

"They only had to let the birds increase," Evanie had said, "by destroying their chief enemy—the Egyptian cat; the house-cat. It was acclimatized here and running wild in the woods, so they bred a parasite—the Feliphage—which destroyed it. Since then there have been many birds, and fewer insects."

It was pleasant to stroll through that green forest, to that bird orchestral accompaniment. The spring breeze touched Tom Connor's face lightly, and for the first time in his life he knew what it was to stroll in freedom, untouched by the pestiferous annoyance of mosquitoes, swarming gnats and midges, or other stinging insects that once had made the greenwood sometimes akin to purgatory.

What a boon to humanity! Honey bees buzzed in the dandelions in the carpeting grass, and drank the sweetness from spring flowers, but no mites or flies buzzed about Connor's uncovered, unflung head as he swung along briskly.

Connor did not know how far he had penetrated into the depths of the newly green woods when he found himself following the course of a small stream. Its silvery waters sparkled in the sunlight filtering through the trees as it moved along, lazily somnolent.

Now and then he passed mossy and viny heaps of stones, interesting to him, since he knew, from what he had been told, that they were the sole reminders of ancient structures erected before the Dark Centuries. Those heaps of stones had once formed buildings in another, and long-gone age—his own age.

Idly following the little stream, he came at last to a wide bend where the stream came down from higher ground to spill in a little splashing falls.

He had just rounded the bend, his eyes on a clear, still pool beyond, when he stopped stockstill, his eyes widening incredulously.

It was as if he were seeing spread before him a picture, well known in his memory, and now brought to animate life. Connor had thought himself alone in that wood, but he was not. Sharing it with him, there within short yards of where he stood, was the most beautiful creature on whom he had ever looked.

It was hard to believe she was a liv-

ing, breathing being and not a figment of his imagination. No sound had warned her of his approach and, sublimely unaware that she was not alone, she held the pose in which Connor had first seen her, like some lovely wood sprite—which she might be, in this increasingly astonishing new world.

SHE was on her knees beside the darkly mirrored pool, supported by the slender arms and hands that looked alabaster white against the mossy bank on which she pressed. She was smiling down at her own reflection in the water—the famous Psyche painting which Connor so well remembered, come to life!

He was afraid to breathe, much less to speak, for fear of startling her. But when she turned her head and saw him, she showed no signs of being startled. Slowly she smiled and got gracefully to her feet, the clinging white Grecian draperies that swathed her gently swaying in the breeze to outline a figure too perfect to be flesh and blood. It was accentuated by the silver cord that crossed beneath her breasts, as sparkling as her ink-black hair.

But as she smiled at Connor, instantly in the depths of her sea-green eyes he saw no fear of him; but mockery.

"I did not know," she said, in a voice that held the resonance of a silvery bell, "that any Weeds ever cared so much about the beauties of Nature to penetrate so far into the forest."

"I am not a Weed," Connor promptly disclaimed, as unconsciously he took a step or two nearer her. He hoped that she would not vanish at the sound of his voice, or at his approach. "I am—"

She stared at him a moment, then laughed. And the laughter, too, was mocking.

"No need to tell me," she said airily. "I know. You are the Sleeper who was recently revived—with the great tale of having slept a thousand years. As if you were an Immortal!"

In her laughter, her voice, was the lofty intimation that she, at least, believed nothing of the sort. Connor made no attempt to convince her—not then. He was too enthralled, merely gazing at her.

"Are you one of the Immortals?" he asked, his own voice awed. "I have heard much of them."

"There are many things more immortal," she said, half cryptically, half mockingly, "than the human to whom has been given immortality. Such Immortals know nothing of all that was known, or guessed, by the Greeks of long, long ages past."

Again Connor stared at her. She spoke so confidently. And she looked. . . . Could it be possible that the gods and goddesses, the sprites, of that long-dead Greek age were not legends, after all, but living entities? Could it be possible that he was gazing on one now—and that she might vanish at a touch, at a word?

She seemed real enough, though, and there was a certain imperiousness in her manner that was not his idea of what should be the reaction of any lovely sprite straight out of the pages of mythology. None of it seemed real—except her extravagant, pulse-warming beauty.

CHAPTER IV

A Bit of Ancient History

THE girl's words snapped him out of his reverie, with the confused knowledge that he was staring at her inanely as she stood there, swaying slightly, like a slender reed, while the gentle breeze whipped her white, gauzy draperies.

"Come," she said peremptorily. "Come sit beside me here. I have come to the forest to find adventure that I cannot find elsewhere in a boring world. I have not found it. Come, you shall amuse me. Sit here and tell me this story I have been hearing about your—sleep."

Half-hypnotically, Connor obeyed. Nor did he question why. It was all in a line with the rest, that he should find himself here above the sparkling dark pool, beside this woman—or girl,

rather, since she could be no more than eighteen—whose beauty was starkly incredible.

The sun, filtering through the leaves, touched her mop of hair, so black that it glinted blue as it fell in waving cascades below her slender waist. Her skin, magnolia-tinted, was all the clearer because of the startling ebony of her hair. Her beauty was more than a lack of flaws; it was, in true fact, goddesslike. But sultry, flaming. Her perfect lips seemed constantly smiling, but like the smile in her emerald eyes, it was sardonic, mocking.

For one moment the beauty of this wood sprite, come upon so unexepectedly, swept all other thoughts from Connor's mind; even memory of Evanie. But the next moment Evanie was back, filling his thoughts as she had from the first with her cool, understandable, coppery-haired loveliness. But even in that moment he knew that the radiant creature beside him, so different from Evanie and other Weed girls he had seen, would forever haunt him. Whoever, whatever she might be—human being or wood goddess.

The girl grew impatient at his silence.

"Tell me!" she said imperiously. "I have said to you, I would be amused. Tell me—Sleeper."

"I am no Sleeper—of the type of which you probably have customarily heard," Connor said, obedient to her command. "Whatever has come to me has been none of my own doing; nor by my wishes. It was like this—"

Briefly he recited his experience, all that he knew of it, making no dramatic effort. He must have been impressive, for as he talked, he could see the incredulity and mockery pass from her sea-green eyes, to be replaced by reluctant belief, then astonishment.

"It is almost unbelievable," she said softly, when he had finished. "But I do believe you." Her marvelous eyes held a far-away expression. "If in your memory you have retained knowledge of your own ancient times, great things await you in this age to which you have come."

"But I know nothing about this age!" Connor quickly complained. "I glean snatches of this and that, of some mysterious Immortals who seem to reign supreme, of many things alien to me and my understanding. But so far, I have not been able to learn much about this age. No! Nor do I even know anything of the history of the ages that have passed while I was—sleeping!"

CONNOR'S wood sprite looked hard at him a moment, admiration for him plain in her low-lidded glance. The mockery flickered a moment in her eyes; then died.

"Shall I tell you?" she asked. "We of the woods and valleys know many things. We learn as the cycles of years go by. But not always do we pass our knowledge along."

"Please!" begged Connor. "Please tell me—everything. I am lost!"

She seemed a little uncertain where to begin, then suddenly started to talk as if giving an all-inclusive lesson in history from the beginning of time.

"You of the ancient world had great cities," she said. "Today there are mighty cities, too. N'York had eight millions of people; Urbs, the great metropolis of this age, has thirty millions. But where there is now one metropolis, your world had a hundred. A marvelous age, that time of yours, but it ended. Some time in your Twentieth Century, it went out in a blaze of war."

"The Twentieth Century!" exclaimed Connor. "So near my time!"

"Yes. Your fierce, warlike nations sated their lust for battle at last in one gigantic war that spread like a cloud around the planet. They fought by sea, by land, by air, and beneath sea and land. They fought with weapons whose secrets are still lost, with strange chemistries, with diseases. Every nation was caught in the struggle; all their vast knowledge went into it, and city after giant city was destroyed by atomic bombs or annihilated by infected water supplies. Famine stalked the world, and after it swept swift pestilence.

"But, by the fiftieth year after the

war, the world had reached a sort of stability. Then came barbarism. The old nations had fallen, and in their place came numberless little city-states, little farming communities each sufficient to itself, weaving its own cloth, raising its own food. And then the language began to change."

"Why?" asked Connor. "Children speak like their parents."

"Not exactly," said the wood sprite, with a slow smile. "Language evolves by laws. Here's one: Consonants tend to move forward in the mouth as languages age. Take the word 'mother.' In the ancient Tokhar, it was *makar*. Then the Latin, *mater*. Then *madre*, then mother and now our modern word muvver. Do you see? K—T—D—Th—V—each sound a little advanced in the throat. The ultimate of course, is mama—pure labial sounds, which proves only that it's the oldest word in the world."

"I see," said Connor.

"Well, once it was released from the bonds of printing, language changed. It became difficult to read the old books, and then the books began to vanish. Fire gutted the abandoned cities; the robber bands that lurked there burned books by winter for warmth. Worms and decay ruined them. Precious knowledge vanished, some of it forever."

SHE paused a moment, watching Connor keenly. "Do you see now," she asked, "why I said greatness awaits you if you retain any of your ancient knowledge?"

"Possibly," said Connor. "But go on, please."

"Other factors, too, were at work," she said, nodding. "In the first place, a group of small city-states seems to be the best environment for genius. That was the situation in Greece during the Golden Age, in Italy during the Renaissance, and all over the world before the Second Enlightenment.

"Then too, a period of barbarism seems to act as a time of rest for humanity before a charge to new heights. The Stone Age flared suddenly into the light of Egypt, Persia decayed and Greece flowered, and the Middle Ages awoke to the glory of the Renaissance. So the Dark Centuries began to flame into the brilliant age of the Second Enlightenment, the fourth great dawn in human history.

"It began quietly enough, about two centuries after the war. A young man named John Holland drifted into the village of N'Orleans that sprawled beside the ancient city's ruins. He found the remnants of a library, and he was one of those rare ones who could read. He studied alone at first, but soon others joined him, and the Academy was born.

"The townspeople thought the students wizards and sorcerers, but as knowledge grew the words wizard and sorcerer became synonyms for what your age called scientists."

"I see!" muttered Connor, and he was thinking of Evanie the Sorceress. "I see!"

"N'Orleans," said his own charming enlightener, "became the center of the Enlightment, and played Athens to the world. Holland died, but the Academy lived, and one day a young student named Teran had a vision. Some of the ancient knowledge had by now yielded its secrets, and Teran's vision was to recondition the centuries-old N'Orleans power plants and water systems—to give the city its utilities!

"That there was no power, no coal, no oil, didn't stop him. He and his group scraped and filed and welded away at the ancient machines, firmly believing that when power was needed, it would be there.

"He was right. It was the gift of an old man named Einar Olin, who had wandered over the continent seeking—and finding—the last and greatest achievement of the Ancients; atomic energy. N'Orleans became a miracle city where wheels turned and lights glowed. Across plains and mountains came hundreds just to see the Great City, and among these were three on whom history turned.

"These were sandy-haired Martin Sair, and black-haired Joaquin Smith, and his sister. Some have called her satanically beautiful. The Black

The Master sat without change of expression, uninjured (Chapter XIV)

Flame, they call her now—have you heard?"

Connor shook his head, his eyes drinking in the beauty of this woman of the woods, who fascinated him as he had never believed possible.

For a moment the mocking glint came back in the girl's eyes, then instantly it was gone as she shrugged her white shoulders and went on.

"Those three changed the whole course of history. Martin Sair turned to biology and medicine when he joined the half-monastic Academy, and his genius added the first new discovery to add to the knowledge of the Ancients. Studying evolution, experimenting with hard radiations, he found sterility then—immortality!

"Joaquin Smith found his field in the neglected social sciences, government, economics, psychology. He too had a dream—of rebuilding the old world. He was—or is—a colossal genius. He took Martin Sair's immortality and traded it for power. He traded immortality to Jorgensen for a rocket that flew on the atomic blast, to Kohlmar for a weapon, to Erden for the Erden resonator that explodes gunpowder miles away. And then he gathered his army and marched."

"War again!" Connor said tightly. "I should have thought they would have had enough."

BUT the girl did not heed him. In her emerald eyes was a light as if she were seeing visions herself—visions of glorious conquest.

"N'Orleans," she said, "directly in the light of Joaquin Smith's magnetic personality, yielded gladly. Other cities yielded almost as if fascinated, while those who fought were overcome. What chance had rifle and arrow against the flying Triangles of Jorgensen, or Kohlmar's ionic beams? And Joaquin Smith himself was—well, magnificent. Even the wives of the slain cheered him when he comforted them in that noble manner of his.

"America was conquered within sixty years. Immortality gave Smith, the Master, power, and no one save Martin Sair and those he taught has ever been able to learn its secret. Thousands have tried, many have claimed success, but the results of their failures still haunt the world.

"And—well, Joaquin Smith has his world Empire now; not America alone. He has bred out criminals and the feeble-minded, he has impressed his native English on every tongue, he has built Urbs, the vast, glittering, brilliant, wicked world capital, and there he rules with his sister, Margaret of Urbs, beside him. Yet—"

"I should think this world he conquered would worship him!" exclaimed Connor.

"Worship him!" cried the girl. "Too many hate him, in spite of all he has done, not only for this age, but for ages gone—since the Enlightenment. He—"

But Tom Connor was no longer listening. All his thoughts, his attention, his eyes that drank in her beauty, were on the girl. So lovely—and to have so much wisdom stored up in the brain beneath the sheen of that black-satiny cap that was her hair. There could only be one answer to that. She *must* be a goddess, come to life.

He ached to touch her, to touch only the hem of her gauzy garment, but that must not be. His heart pounded at the very nearness of her—but it was with a worship that could have thrown him prostrate at her feet.

"It's all like a dream, what you've told me," he said, his voice far-away, musing. "You're a dream."

The dancing light of mockery came back into her sea-green eyes.

"Shall we leave it a dream—this meeting of ours?" she asked softly. She laid one white hand lightly on his arm and he thrilled at the touch as though an electric current had shot through him—but not a painful, annihilating one now. "Man of the Ancients," she said, "will you give me a promise?"

"Anything — anything!" Connor said eagerly.

"Then promise me you will say nothing, not even to the Weed girl who is called Evanie the Sorceress, about having seen me this morning. No slightest hint."

FOR a moment Connor hesitated. Would it be disloyalty to Evanie, in any way, to make that promise? He did not know. What he did know was that it fell in with his own ideas to keep this meeting a secret—like something sacred; something to hold as a memory deep within his own heart only.

"Promise?" she repeated, in that silvery-bell voice.

Connor nodded. "I promise," he said soberly. "But tell me, will I see you again? Will you—"

Suddenly the girl leaped lightly to her feet, startled, as she stood listening; like the faun she probably was. Her astonishing emerald eyes were wide, as she poised for flight. Dimly, the entranced Connor became aware of voices back in the woods. Men were probably coming to seek him, knowing how sick he had been.

"I must flee!" the girl whispered quickly. "But Man of the Ancients, we *shall* meet again! That is my promise. Keep yours!"

And then, before he could speak, she had whirled like a butterfly in flight, and was speeding through the woods on noiseless feet. Connor caught one last glimpse of her fluttering white draperies against the brown and green of tree trunks and leaves, then she was gone.

He passed a hand slowly before his bewildered eyes. A dream! It must be. But she had promised they would meet again. When?

CHAPTER V

The Village

DAYS slipped imperceptibly by. Connor had almost regained his full strength. Time and again, whenever he could do so unobserved, he slipped away to the woods alone, but never again did he catch sight of the wood nymph who had so deeply fascinated him. Gradually he came to persuade himself that the whole incident had been a dream. Many things as strange had happened to him since his strange awakening. Only one thing gave it the semblance of reality—the knowledge he had gleaned from the inky-haired girl of mystery, a knowledge later confirmed when he began to enter the peaceful life of the village.

Aside from Evanie, however, he had but one other close friend. He had taken at once to Jan Orm, engineer and operator of the village of Ormon's single factory on the hill.

The factory was a perpetual surprise to Connor. The incredibly versatile machines made nearly everything except the heavier mechanisms used in the fields, and these, he learned, could have been made. That was not necessary since the completed machines could as easily be transported as the steel necessary to construct them.

The atomic power amazed Tom Connor. The motors burned only water, or rather the hydrogen in it, and the energy was the product of synthesis rather than disintegration. Four hydrogen atoms, with their weight of 1.008, combined into one helium atom with a weight of 4; somewhere had disappeared the difference of .032, and this was the source of that abundant energy — matter being destroyed, weight transformed to energy.

There was a whole series of atomic furnaces too. The release of energy was a process of one degree, like radium; once started, neither temperature nor pressure could speed or slow it in the least. But the hydrogen burned steadily into helium at the uniform rate of half its mass in three hundred days.

Jan Orm was proud of the plant.

"Neat, isn't it?" he asked Connor. "One of the type called Omnifac; make anything. There's thousands of 'em about the country; practically make each town independent, self-sustaining. We don't need your ancient cumbersome railroad system to transport coal and ore."

"How about the metal you use?"

"Nor metal either," Jan said. "Just as there was a stone age, a bronze age, and an iron age, just as history calls your time the age of steel, we're in

the aluminum age. And aluminum's everywhere; it's the base of all clays, almost eight per cent of the Earth's crust."

"I know it's there," grunted Connor. "It used to cost too much to get it out of clay."

"Well, power costs nothing now. Water's free." His face darkened moodily. "If we could only *control* the rate, but power comes out at always the same rate—a half period of three hundred days. If we could build rockets—like the Triangles of Urbs. The natural rate is just too slow to lift its own weight; the power from a pound of water comes out too gradually to raise a one-pound mass. The Urbans know how to increase the rate, to make the water deliver half its energy in a hundred days—ten days."

"And if you could build rockets?"

"Then," said Jan, growing even moodier, "then we'd—" He paused abruptly. "We *can* detonate it," he said in a changed voice. "We *can* get all the energy in one terrific blast, but that's useless for a rocket."

"Why can't you use a firing chamber and explode say a gram of water at a time?" Connor asked. "A rapid series of little explosions should be just as effective as a continuous blast."

"My father tried that," Jan Orm said grimly. "He's buried at the bend of the river."

LATER, Connor asked Evanie why Jan was so anxious to develop atom-powered rockets. The girl turned suddenly serious eyes on him, but made no direct reply.

"The Immortals guard the secret of the Triangle," was all she said. "It's a military secret."

"But what could he do with a rocket?"

She shook her glistening hair.

"Nothing, perhaps."

"Evanie," he said soberly, "I don't like to feel that you won't trust me. I know from what you've said that you're somehow opposed to the government. Well, I'll help you, if I can—but I can't if you keep me in ignorance."

The girl was silent.

"And another thing," he proceeded. "This immortality process. I've heard somebody say that the results of its failures when some tried it, still haunt the world? Why, Evanie?"

Swiftly a crimson flush spread over the girl's cheeks and throat.

"Now what the devil have I said?" he cried. "Evanie, I swear I wouldn't hurt you for the world!"

"Don't," she only murmured, turning silently away.

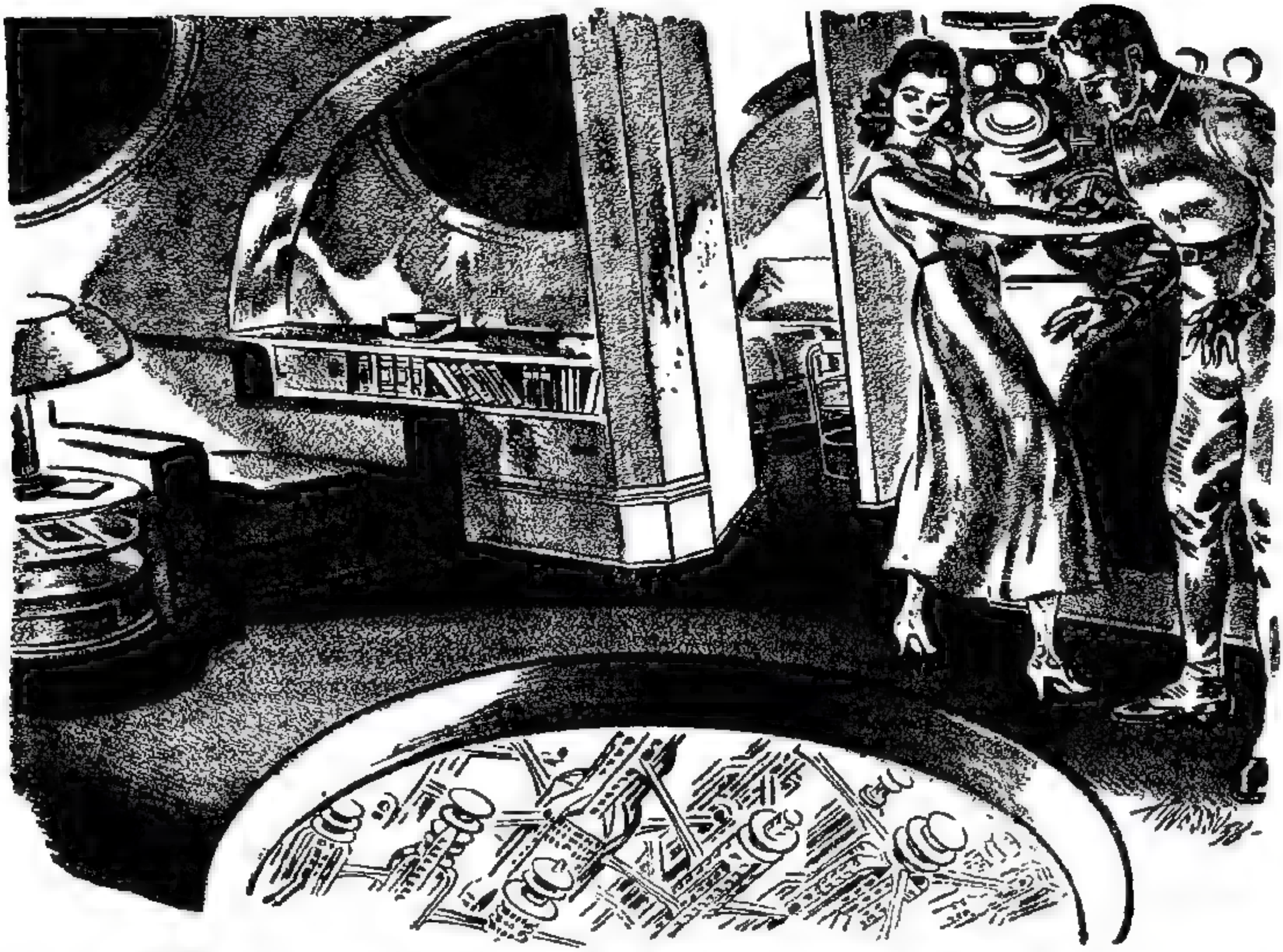
He, too, was hurt, because she was. He knew he owed his life to her for her treatments and hospitality. It disturbed him to think he knew of no way in which to repay her. But he was dubious of his ability to earn much as an engineer in this world of strange devices.

"I'd have to start right at the bottom," he observed ruefully to Evanie when he spoke of that later.

"In Urbs," Evanie said, "you'd be worth your weight in radium as a source of ancient knowledge. So much has been lost; so much is gone, perhaps forever. Often we have only the record of a great man's name, and no trace of his work. Of these is a man named Einstein and another named de Sitter—men acknowledged to be supreme geniuses of science even by the supreme scientists of your age. Their work is lost."

"I'm afraid it will remain lost, then," he said whimsically. "Both Einstein and de Sitter were contemporaries of mine, but I wasn't up to understanding their theories. All I know is that they dealt with space and time, and a supposed curvature of space — Relativity, the theory was called."

"But that's exactly the clue they'd want in Urbs!" exclaimed Evanie, her eyes shining. "That's all they'd need. And think of what you could tell them of ancient literature! We haven't the artists and writers you had—not yet. The plays of a man named Shakespeare are still the most popular of all on the vision broadcasts. I always watch them." She looked up wistfully. "Was he also a contemporary of yours? And did you know a philoso-



Urbs Minor slipped smoothly into the range of vision (Chapter XIX)

pher named Aristotle?"

Connor laughed.

"I missed the one by three centuries and the other by twenty-five!" he chuckled.

"I'm sorry," said the girl, flushing red. "I don't know much of history."

HE smiled warmly.

"If I thought I could actually earn something—if I could pay you for all the trouble I've been, I'd go to this city of Urbs for awhile—and then come back here. I'd like to pay you."

"Pay me?" she asked in surprise. "We don't use money here, except for taxes."

"The taxes?"

"Yes. The Urban taxes. They come each year to collect, and it must be paid in money." She frowned angrily. "I hate Urbs and all it stands for! I hate it!"

"Are the taxes so oppressively high?"

"Oppressive?" she retorted. "Any tax is oppressive! It's a difference in degree, that's all! As long as a government has the right to tax, the potential injustice is there. And what of other rights the Master arrogates to himself?" She paused as if to let the full enormity of that strike in.

"Well?" he said carelessly, "That's been a privilege granted to the heads of many governments, hasn't it?"

Her eyes blazed. "I can't understand a man who's willing to surrender his natural rights!" she flared. "Our men would die for a principle!"

"But they're not doing it," observed Connor caustically.

"Because they'd be throwing their lives away uselessly—that's why! They can't fight the Master now with any chance of success. But just wait until the time comes!"

"And then, I suppose, the whole world will be just one great big beautiful state of anarchy."

"And isn't that an ideal worth fighting for?" asked the girl hotly. "To permit every single individual to attain his rightful liberty? To destroy

every chance of injustice?"

"But—"

Connor paused, considering. Why should he be arguing like this with Evanie? He felt no allegiance to the government of Urbs; the Master meant nothing to him. The only government he could have fought for, died for, was lost a thousand years in the past. Whatever loyalty he owed in this topsy-turvy age belonged to Evanie. He grinned. "Crazy or not, Evanie," he promised, "your cause is mine!"

She softened suddenly.

"Thank you, Tom." Then, in lower tones, "Now you know why Jan Orm is so anxious for the secret of the rocket blast. Do you see?" Her voice dropped to a whisper. "Revolution!"

He nodded. "I guessed that. But since you've answered one question, perhaps you'll answer my other one. What are the failures that still haunt the world, the products of the immortality treatment?"

Again that flush of unhappiness.

"He meant—the metamorphs," she murmured softly.

Quickly she rose and passed into the cottage.

CHAPTER VI

The Metamorphs

CONNOR'S strength swiftly approached normal, and shortly little remained of that unbelievable sojourn in the grave. His month's grizzle of beard began to be irritating, and one day he asked Jan for a razor.

Jan seemed puzzled; at Connor's explanation he laughed, and produced a jar of salve that quickly dissolved the stubble, assuring Connor that the preparation would soon destroy the growth entirely.

But Evanie's reaction surprised him. She stared for a moment without recognition.

"Tom!" she cried. "You look—you look like an ancient statue!"

He did look different from the mild-featured villagers. With the beard removed, his lean face had an aura of strength and ruggedness that was quite unlike the appearance of his neighbors.

Time slipped pleasantly away. Evenings he spent talking to newly made friends, relating stories of his dead age, explaining the state of politics, society, and science in that forgotten time. Often Evanie joined in the conversation, though at other times she amused herself at the "vision," a device of remarkable perfection, on whose two-foot screen actors in distant cities spoke and moved with the naturalness of miniature life.

Connor himself saw "Winter's Tale" and "Henry the Eighth" given in accurate portrayal, and was once surprised to discover a familiar-seeming musical comedy, complete to scantily-clad chorus. In many ways Evanie puzzled Tom Connor. There was some mystery about her that he could not understand. Life in Ormon, it seemed to him, was essentially what it had been in his old days in St. Louis. Young men still followed immemorial routine; each evening saw them walking, sitting, talking, with girls, idling through the parklike arcades of trees, strolling along the quiet river.

But not Evanie. No youth ever climbed the hill to her cottage, or sat with her at evening—except when Jan Orm occasionally came. And this seemed strange, considering the girl's loveliness. Connor couldn't remember a more attractive girl than this spirited, gentle, demure Evanie—except his girl of the woods. Not even Ruth, of the buried days of the past.

He mused over the matter until a more sensational mystery effaced it.

One morning he and Jan Orm and Evanie went hunting game up-river. Deer were fairly plentiful, and game-birds, wild turkeys, and pheasants had increased until they were nearly as common as crows once had been.

The trio carried glistening bows of spring steel that flung slender steel arrows with deadly accuracy, if used properly. Connor was awkward, but Evanie and Jan Orm handled them with skill. Connor bemoaned the lack of rifles; he had been a fair marksman

in the old days.

"I'd show you!" he declared. "If I only had my Marlin repeater!"

"Guns aren't made any more," said Jan. "The Erden Resonator did for them; they're useless for military weapons."

"BUT for hunting?"

"They're banned by law. For awhile after the founding of the Urban Empire people kept 'em hidden around, but no one knew when a resonator might sweep the section, and folks got tired of having the things go off at night, smashing windows and plowing walls. They weren't safe house-pets."

"Well," grumbled Connor, "I'd like one now, even an air-rifle. Say!" he exclaimed. "Why not a water-gun?"

"A water-gun?"

"One run by atomic energy. Didn't you say you could detonate it—get all the power out at once?"

"Yes, but—" Jan Orm paused. "By God!" he roared. "That's the answer! That's the weapon! Why didn't anybody think of that before? There's what we need to—" He broke his sentence in mid-air.

Evanie smiled. "It's all right," she said. "Tom knows."

"Yes," said Connor, "and I'm with you in your revolutionary ambitions."

"I'm glad," Jan Orm said simply. His eyes lighted. "That gun! It's a stroke of genius. The resonators can't damage an atom-powered rifle! Evanie, the time draws near!"

The three proceeded thoughtfully up the river bank. The midsummer sun beat down upon them with withering intensity. Connor mopped his streaming brow.

"How I'd like a swim!" he ejaculated. "Evanie, do you people ever swim here? That place where the river's backed up by that fallen bridge—it should be a great place for a dip!"

"Oh, no!" the girl said quickly. "Why should we swim? You can bathe every day in the pool at home."

That was true. The six-foot basin where water, warmed to a pleasant tepidity by atomic heat, bubbled steadily though, was always available. But it was a poor substitute for swimming in open water.

"That little lake looked tempting," Connor sighed.

"The lake!" cried Evanie, in horror. "Oh, no! No! You can't swim there!"

"Why not?"

"You just can't!"

And that was as much information as he could obtain. Shortly afterward, swinging the half-dozen birds that had fallen to their arrows, they started back for the village.

BUT Connor was determined to ferret out at least that one mystery—why he should not swim in the lake. The next time he accompanied Jan Orm on a tramp up-river, he plied Jan with questions. But it was futile. He could extract no more from Jan Orm than he had from Evanie.

As the pair approached the place of the ruined bridge that damned the stream, they turned a little ways inland. Jan's keen eyes spotted a movement in a thick copse.

"Deer in there," he whispered. "Let's separate and start him."

He bore off to the left, and Connor, creeping cautiously to the right, approached the grass-grown marge of the flowage. Suddenly he stopped short. Ahead of him the sun had glinted on something large and brown and wet, and he heard a rustle of movement. He moved stealthily forward; with utmost care he separated a screen of brush, and gazed through it to a little open glade, and on the creature that sprawled there beside the water.

AT first he saw only a five-foot strip of wet, hairless, oily skin that heaved to the thing's slow breathing. He held his bow ready lest it prove dangerous, and stared, wondering what sort of creature it could be. It was certainly nothing native to the North America of his day. And then, at some sound or movement of his, the beast rolled over and faced him.

Connor felt sick. He glimpsed short, incredibly thick limbs, great splay feet with webbed toes, broad hands with webbed fingers. But what

sickened him was the smooth bulbous face with its tiny eyes and little round red-lipped mouth.

The thing was, or had been, human!

Connor let out a choking yell. The creature, with a mumble that might have been speech, flopped awkwardly to the bank and into the water, where it cleaved the element like an otter and disappeared with a long, silent wake.

He heard the crashing of Jan Orm's approach, and his cry of inquiry. But a webbed print in the mud of the bank told Jan Orm the story.

"Wh-what was it?" Connor choked.

"A metamorph," said Jan soberly.

Empty-handed as they were, he turned homeward. Connor, too aghast to press questions, followed him. And then came the second mystery.

Connor saw it first—a face, a child's face, peering at them from a leafy covert. But this was no human child. Speechless, Connor saw the small pointed ears that twitched, the pointed teeth, the little black slanting eyes squinting at him beadily. The face was that of a young satyr, a child of Pan. It was the spirit of the wilderness incarnate, not evil exactly, not even savage, but just wild—wild!

The imp vanished instantly. As Connor gasped, "What's that?" it was already far beyond arrow-shot, headed for the forest. Jan viewed it without surprise.

"It's a young metamorph," he said. "A different sort than the one at the lake." He paused and stared steadily into Connor's eyes.

"Promise me something," he muttered.

"What?"

"That you'll not tell Evanie you saw these things."

"If you wish," said Connor slowly. It was all beyond him.

CHAPTER VII

Panate Blood

BUT Tom Connor was determined now to fathom these mysteries. Jan should no longer put him off. He stopped and placed a hand firmly on Jan's arm, forced the man to look into his eyes when Jan would have evaded his gaze.

"Just what," he said bluntly, "is a metamorph? You must tell me, Jan!"

There was a moment's uncomfortable silence.

"That question has been evaded long enough," Connor said firmly, "and I intend to know why. This is my world now. I've got to live in it, and I want to know what others know of it—its faults as well as its virtues. Why have you shunned the question?"

"Because—because—"

"Because of Evanie!" supplied Connor.

"Yes," Jan agreed, reluctantly. "Because of Evanie."

"What has that monster at the lake to do with her?"

"Nothing directly." Jan Orm paused. "Before I tell you more, Tom, I'm going to ask you something. Do you love Evanie?"

"I'm very fond of her."

"But do you love her?" Jan insisted.

"Yes," said Connor suddenly. "I do."

A swift thought had come to him before he had reached that decision. The vision of a smiling wood nymph was before his eyes. But only a human being could be loved by a man—a coolly lovely girl like Evanie; not a goddess.

"Why do the youths of Ormon ignore Evanie so, Jan?" Connor asked abruptly. "She's far the loveliest girl in town."

"So she is, Tom. It's her own doing that they ignore her. They have tried to be friends with her—have tried hard. But she—well, she has always discouraged them."

"Why?"

"Because, I think, she feels that in justice to everybody she can't marry."

"And again why?"

For a long moment Jan Orm hesitated. "I'll tell you," he decided finally. "Tom, she's one-eighth metamorph!"

"What?"

"Yes. Her mother was the daughter of Montmerci the Anadominist. A

great man, but half metamorph."

"Do you mean," asked Conner, aghast, "that she has the blood of that lake monster in her?"

"No! Oh, no! There are two kinds of metamorphs. One sort, the Panate metamorph, is human; the others, the amphimorphs, are just—horrors. Evanie's blood is Panate. But she has conquered her metamorphic heredity."

"A metamorph!" Connor groaned.

THE picture of that flopping horror rose in his mind, and then the vision of the wild, impish face of the woods child. There was something reminiscent of Evanie in that, the color of her bronze hair, an occasional glint in her deep eyes.

"Tell me," he said huskily, "about that heredity of hers. Might her child, for instance, turn wild? Or turn into such a horror as an—amphimorph?"

Jan Orm smiled.

"By no chance! The Panate metamorphs, I tell you, are human. They're people. They're much like us—good and bad, brilliant and stupid, and many of them surpassingly beautiful in their wild way."

"But just what are they? Where'd they come from?"

"Do you remember hearing Martin Sair mentioned? He was companion of the Master, Evanie's great-uncle thirty generations removed."

"The discoverer of immortality? I remember."

But Connor made no mention of when he had first heard of both Martin Sair and the Master—from an uncannily beautiful wood sprite who had seemed to possess all the wisdom of the ages.

"Yes," Jan told him. "And you must have heard, too, that there were other attempts at making men immortal, in the first century of the Enlightenment. And failures. Some that still haunt the world. Well, the metamorphs are those failures."

"I see," said Connor slowly.

"They're a mutation, an artificial mutation," Jan explained. "When Martin Sair's discovery became known, thousands sought to imitate him. It was understood that

The Messenger launched itself at his head (Chapter XII)

he was working with hard radiations, but just what was a mystery—whether as hard as the cosmic rays or as soft as the harder x-rays. Nevertheless, many charlatans claimed to be able to give immortality, and there were thousands of eager victims. It was a mania, a wave of lunacy. The laboratories of the tricksters were packed.

"There were four directions of error to be made; those who had not Sair's secret, erred in all four. People who were treated with too hard radiations died; those treated with too soft rays simply became sterile. Those treated with the right rays, but for too long a time, remained themselves unchanged, but bore amphimorphs as children; those treated for too short a time bore Panate metamorphs.

"Can you imagine the turmoil? In a world just emerging from barbarism, still disorganized, of course some of the freaks survived. Near the sea coasts amphimorphs began to appear, and in lakes and rivers; while in the hills and forests the Children of Nature, the Panate type, went trouping through the wilderness."

"But why weren't they exterminated?" asked Connor tensely. "You've bred out criminals. Why let these creatures exist?"

"Criminals could be reached and sterilized. It's impossible to sterilize beings who slip into the sea at one's approach, or who fade like shadows into the depths of a forest."

"Then why not kill them off?"

"Would *you* favor such a measure?"

"No," Connor said, adding in impassioned tone: "It would be nothing less than murder, even to kill the swimmers! Are they—intelligent?"

"In a dim fashion. The amphimorphs are creatures cast back to the amphibious stageofthe human embryo—just above the gilled period. The others, the Panates, are strange. Except for an odd claustrophobia, the fear of enclosed things—of houses or clothing—they're quite as intelligent as most of us. And they're comparatively harmless."

CONNOR heaved a sigh of relief. "Then they aren't a problem?"

"Oh, there were consequences," Jan said wryly. "Their women are often very beautiful, like the marble figures of nymphs dug up in Europe. There have been many cases like Evanie's. Many of us may have a drop or so of metamorphic blood. But it falls hardest on the first offspring, the hybrids, miserable creatures unable to endure civilized life, and often most unhappy in the wilds. Yet even these occasionally produce a genius. Evanie's grandfather is one."

"What did he do?"

"He was known as Montmerci the Anodominist, half human, half metamorph. Yet his was a powerful personality. He was strong enough to lead an abortive revolution against the Master. Both humans and metamorphs followed him. He even managed to direct a group of amphimorphs, who got into the city's water supply and erupted into the sewers by hundreds."

"But what happened to the revolution?"

"It was quickly suppressed," Jan said bitterly. "What could a horde armed with bows and knives do against the Rings and ionic beams of Urbs?"

"And Montmerci?"

"He was executed—a rare punishment. But the Master realized the danger from this wild metamorph. A second attempt might have been successful. That's why Evanie hates Urbs so intensely."

"Evanie!" Connor said musingly. "Tell me, what was it that led to her father's marrying a—a—"

"A cross? Well, Evan Sair was like Evanie, a doctor. He came upon Meria, the daughter of Montmerci, down in the mountain region called Ozarky. He found her there sick just after the collapse of the uprising. So Evan Sair cared for her and fell in love with her. He brought her here to his home, and married her, but she soon began to weaken again from lack of the open woods and sunlight.

"She died when Evanie was born, but she would have died anyway."

Jan Orm paused and drew a long breath. "Now do you see why

Evanie fears her own blood? Why she has driven away the youths who tried to arouse even friendship? She's afraid of the sleeping metamorphic nature in her, and needlessly afraid, since she's safely human. She has even tried to drive me away, but I refuse to be so driven. I understand."

"So do I," said Connor soberly. "And I'm going to marry her."

JAN ORM smiled dryly. "And if she thinks otherwise?"

"Then I must convince her."

Jan shook his head in mild wonderment. "Perhaps you can," he said, with the barest hint of reluctance. "There's something dynamic about you. In some ways you're like the Immortals of Urbs."

When they reached the village, Connor left Jan Orm and trudged in a deep reverie up Evanie's hill, musing on the curious revelations he had heard, analyzing his own feelings. Did he really love the bronze-haired Evanie? The query had never presented itself until Jan had put it to him, so bluntly, yet now he was certain he did. Admitting that, then—had he the right to ask her to marry a survival of the past, a revivified mummy, a sort of living fossil?

What damage might that millenium of sleep have done him? Might he not awake some morning to find the weight of his years suddenly upon him? Might he not disintegrate like a veritable mummy when its wrappings were removed? Still he had never felt stronger or healthier in his life. And was he such a freak, after all, in this world of Immortals, satyrs, and half-human swimmers?

He paused at the door of the cottage, peering within. The miraculous cookstove hissed quietly, and Evanie was humming to herself as she stood before a mirror, brushing the shining metal of her hair. She glimpsed him instantly and whirled. He strode forward and caught her hands.

"Evanie—" he began, and paused as she jerked violently to release herself.

"Please go out!" she said.

He held her wrists firmly. "Evanie, you've got to listen to me. I love you!

"I know those aren't the right words," he stumbled on. "It's just—the best I can do."

"I don't—permit this," she murmured.

"I know you don't, but—Evanie I mean it!"

He tried to draw her closer but she stood stiffly while he slipped his arms about her. By sheer strength he tilted her head back and kissed her.

For a moment he felt her relax against him, then she had thrust him away.

"Please!" she gasped. "You can't!

[*Turn page*]

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You don't—understand!"

"I do," he said gently.

"Then you see how impossible it is for me to—marry?"

"Any wildness in any children of ours," he said with a smile, "might as easily come of the Connor blood."

For a long moment Evanie lay passive in his arms, and then, when she struggled away, he was startled to see tears.

"Tom," she whispered, "if I say I love you will you promise me something?"

"You know I will!"

"Then promise you'll not mention love again, nor try to kiss me, nor even touch me—for a month. After that, I'll—I'll do as you wish. Do you promise?"

"Of course, but why, Evanie? Why?"

"Because within a month," she murmured tensely, "there'll be war!"

CHAPTER VIII

In Time of Peace

CONNOR held strictly to his word with Evanie. But the change in their relationship was apparent to both of them. Evanie no longer met his gaze with frank steadiness. Her eyes would drop when they met his, and she would lose the thread of her sentences in confusion.

Yet when he turned unexpectedly, he always found her watching him with a mixture of abstractedness and speculation. And once or twice he awakened in the morning to find her gazing at him from the doorway with a tender, wistful smile.

One afternoon Jan Orm hailed him from the foot of Evanie's hill.

"I've something to show you," he called, and Connor rose from his comfortable sprawl in the shade and joined him, walking toward the factory across the village.

"I've been thinking, Jan," Connor remarked. "Frankly, I can't yet understand why you consider the Master such a despicable tyrant. I've yet to hear of any really tyrannous act of his."

"He isn't a tyrant," Jan said gloomily. "I wish he were. Then our revolution would be simple. Almost everybody would be on our side. It's evidence of his ability that he avoids any misgovernment, and keeps the greater part of the people satisfied. He's just, kind, and benevolent—on the surface!"

"What makes you think he's different underneath?"

"He retains the one secret we'd all like to possess—the secret of immortality. Isn't that evidence enough that he's supremely selfish? He and his two or three million Immortals—sole rulers of the Earth!"

"Two or three million!"

"Yes. What's the difference how many? They're still ruling half a billion people—a small percentage ruling the many. If he's so benevolent, why doesn't he grant others the privilege of immortality?"

"That's a fair question," said Connor slowly, pondering. "Anyway, I'm on your side, Jan. You're my people now; I owe you all my allegiance." They entered the factory. "And now—what was it you brought me here to see?"

Jan's face brightened.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "Have a look at this."

He brought forth an object from a desk drawer in his office, passing it pridefully to Connor. It was a blunt, thick-handled, blue steel revolver.

"Atom-powered," Jan glowed. "Here's the magazine."

He shook a dozen little leaden balls, each the size of his little fingernail, into his palm.

"No need of a cartridge, of course," commented Connor. "Water in the handle? . . . I thought so. But here's one mistake. You don't want your projectiles round; you lose range and accuracy. Make 'em cylindrical and blunt-pointed." He squinted through the weapon's barrel. "And—there's no rifling."

He explained the purpose of rifling the barrel to give the bullet a rotary motion.

"I might have known enough to consult you first," Jan Orm said wryly. "Want to try it out anyway? I haven't been able to hit much with it so far."

THEY moved through the whirring factory. At the rear the door opened upon a slope away from the village. The ground slanted gently toward the river. Glancing about for a suitable target, Connor seized an empty can from a bench within the door and flung it as far as he could down the slope. He raised the revolver, and suddenly perceived another imperfection that had escaped his notice.

"There are no sights on it!" he ejaculated.

"Sights?" Jan was puzzled.

"To aim by." He explained the principle. "Well, let's try it as is."

He squinted down the smooth barrel, squeezed the trigger. There was a sharp report, his arm snapped back to a terrific recoil, and the can leaped spinning high into the air, to fall yards farther toward the river.

"Wow!" he exclaimed. "What a kick!"

But Jan was leaping with enthusi-

ASTIR

"You hit it! You hit it!"

"Yeah, but it hit back," Connor said ruefully. "While you're making the other changes, lighten the charge a little, else you'll have broken wrists in your army. And I'd set somebody to work on ordnance and rifles. They're a lot more useful than revolvers." At Jan's nod, he asked, "You don't expect to equip the whole revolution with the products of this one factory, do you?"

"Of course not! There are thousands like it, in villages like Ormon. I've already sent descriptions of the weapons we'll need. I'll have to correct them."

"How many men can you count on? Altogether, I mean."

"We should muster twenty-five thousand."

"Twenty-five thousand for a world revolution? An even twenty-five thousand to attack a city of thirty million?"

"Don't forget that the city is all that counts. Who holds Urbs holds the world."

"But still—a city that size! Or even just the three million Immortals. We'll be overwhelmed!"

"I don't think so," Jan said grimly. "Don't forget that in Urbs are several million Anadominists. I count on them to join us. In fact, I'm planning to smuggle arms to them, provided our weapons are successful. They won't be as effective as the ionic beam, but —we can only try. We'll have at least the advantage of surprise, since we don't plan to muster and march on Urbs. We'll infiltrate slowly, and on the given day, at the given hour, we'll strike!"

"There'll be street fighting, then," Connor said. "There's nothing like machine-guns for that."

"What are they?"

JAN'S eyes glowed as Connor explained.

"We can manage those," he decided. "That should put us on a par with the Urban troops, so long as we remain in the city where the air forces can't help them. If only *we* had aircraft!"

"There're airplanes, such as my generation used."

"Too flimsy. Useless against the fliers of Urbs. No, what we need is the secret of the rocket blast, and since that's unobtainable, we'll have to do without. We'll manage to keep our fighting in the City itself. And how we'll need you!"

Connor soon came to realize the truth of Jan's words. What little he knew of trajectories, velocities, and the science of ballistics was taxed to the uttermost. He was astounded to discover that calculus was a lost knowledge, and that Jan was even unacquainted with the use of logarithms and the slide rule.

Rather than plod through hours and hours of mathematical computation, it seemed to Connor the shorter method was to work out a table of logarithms to four places, and to construct a slide rule; in both of these operations Jan joined with growing enthusiasm as understanding increased.

As the preparations progressed,

Connor began to notice other things—the vanishing of familiar faces, the lack of youthful activities. He knew what that meant. The revolutionaries were gradually filtering into Urbs, and the day of the uprising was at hand.

How close it was, however, he never dreamed until he emerged one morning to find Evanie talking to Jan Orm, with her eyes alight. She turned eagerly to Tom, led him back into the cottage.

"Kiss me!" she whispered. "The day is here! We leave for Urbs tonight!"

ALL day there was a hush over the village. It was bereft of youth, girls as well as men. Only the oldsters plodded about in street and field.

Jan Orm confessed to Connor that he was not entirely pleased with all details. His estimate of the number of revolutionaries who would join him had been too high. But the infiltration into the city had been successful, and twenty-two thousand villagers lay armed and hidden among their Urban sympathizers. This, Jan argued, promised a great accession to their ranks once the hour had struck.

"What are your arrangements?" Connor asked.

"Each village has chosen its leader. These leaders have again centralized their command into ten, of whom our Ormon leader happens to be one. But each variety of Weed has its own corps." He smiled. "They call us Weeds, because we're supposed to run wild."

And again there came to Connor a quick mental picture of his beautiful girl of the forest. She, too, had spoken of "Weeds," a little contemptuously, he seemed to remember now. He had not understood her allusion then, had not asked her to explain. But it was plain enough now. Her lofty attitude toward "Weeds," or the common people, must have been because she was an aristocrat herself. Who could she have been? He had seen no one hereabouts bearing any faintest resemblance to her.

He brought his mind swiftly back to Jan.

"If you win," he observed, "you'll have a general battle over the spoils. You may find yourself worse off after the revolution than before."

"We know that," Jan said grimly. "Yet we'll fight side by side until the Master's done for. Afterward—" He spread his hands expressively.

"You mentioned 'our Ormon leader'," remarked Connor. "That's you, of course."

"Oh, no!" Jan chuckled. "That's Evanie."

"The devil!" Connor stared amazed at the gentle, shy, and quiet girl.

"Jan exaggerates," she said, smiling. "I depend on all the rest of you. Especially Jan—and you, Tom."

He shook his head, puzzled about this revolution—shadowy, vague, ill-planned. To assault a world ruler in a colossal city with untrained rabble using weapons unfamiliar to them! Surely the Master must know there was sedition and plotting among his people.

He was about to voice his doubts when a flash of iridescence down the sunny slope caught his eye. It seemed more like a disturbance in the air or a focus of light than a material body. It swept in wide circles as if hunting or seeking, and—Connor heard its high, humming buzz. The creature, if it were a creature, was no more than eighteen inches long, and featureless save for a misty beak at the forward end.

It circled closer, and suddenly he perceived an amazing phenomenon. It was circling the three of them and, he had thought, the cottage too. Then he saw that instead of circling the building it was passing through the walls!

"Look!" he cried. "What's that?"

CHAPTER IX

The Way to Urbs

THE effect on Jan and Evanie was startling. As they perceived the almost invisible thing, the girl shrieked in terror.

"Don't look at it!" Jan choked out. "Don't even think of it!"

Both of them covered their faces with their hands.

They made no attempt to flee; indeed, Connor thought confusedly, how could one hide from a thing that could pass like a phantom through rock walls? He tried to follow their example, but could not resist another peep at the mystery. It was still visible, but further off down the slope toward the river, and as he gazed, it abandoned its circling, passed like a streak of mist over the water, and vanished.

"It's gone," he said mildly. "Suppose you tell me what it was."

"It—it was a Messenger of the Master," murmured Evanie fearfully. "Jan, do you think it was for one of us? If so, that means he suspects!"

"God knows!" Jan muttered. "It looked dim to me, like a stray."

"And what," Connor demanded to know, "is a Messenger of the Master?"

"It's to carry the Master's commands," said Evanie.

"You don't say!" he snapped ironically. "I could guess that from its name. But what is it?"

"It's a mechanism of force, or so we think," said Jan. "It's— Did you ever see ball-lightning?"

Connor nodded.

"Well, there's nothing material, strictly speaking, in ball-lightning. It's a balance of electrical forces. And so are the Messengers—a structure of forces."

"But—was it *alive?*"

"We believe not. Not exactly alive."

Connor groaned. "Not material, strictly speaking, and not exactly alive! In other words, a ghost."

Jan smiled nervously.

"It does sound queer. What I mean is that the Messengers are composed of forces, like ball-lightning. They're stable as long as Urbs supplies enough energy to offset the losses. They don't discharge all at once like ball-lightning. When their energy is cut off, they just dissipate, fade out, vanish.

The amphimorph shot into the pool (Chapter XXIII)

That one missed its mark, if it was for us."

"How do they bear the Master's commands?"

"I hope you never find out," Evanie said softly. "I was sent for once before, but that Messenger missed like this. Jan and I—can close our minds to them. It takes practice to learn how."

"Well," said Connor, "if the Master suspects, you'd better change your plans. Surprise was your one advantage."

"We can't," Jan said grimly. "Our cooperating groups would split into factions in half an hour, given any excuse."

"But—that might have been sent as a warning!"

"No matter. We've got to go ahead. What's more, we'd better leave now."

JAN rose abruptly and departed. A moment later Connor saw him back in a motor vehicle from the hill below the factory. And then, with no more preparation than that, they were jolting over the rutted red clay road, Jan driving, Evanie between the two men.

When they swung suddenly to a wide paved highway, the battered vehicle leaped swiftly to unexpected speed. A full hundred miles an hour, though that was not so greatly in excess of the speed of cars of Connor's own day.

Hour after hour they rushed down the endless way. They passed tree-grown ruins and little villages like Ormon, and as night fell, here and there the lights of some peaceful farm dwelling. Evanie relieved Jan, and then Connor, pleading his acquaintance with ancient automobiles, drove for awhile, to the expressed admiration of the other two.

"You ancients must have been amazing!" said Jan.

"What paving is this?" asked Connor as they darted along.

"Same stuff as our tires. Rubrum. Synthetic rubber."

"Paved by whom?"

"By Urbs," said Jan sourly. "Out of our taxes."

"Well, isn't that one answer to your objections? No taxes, no roads."

"The road through Ormon is maintained without taxes, simply by the coöperation of the people."

Connor smiled, remembering that rutted clay road.

"Is it possible to alienate any of the Master's troops?" he asked. "Trained men would help our chances."

"No" Jan said positively. "The man has a genius for loyalty. Such an attempt would be suicide."

"Humph! Do you know—the more I hear of the Master, the more I like him? I can't see why you hate him so! Apparently, he's a good ruler."

"He is a good ruler, damn his clever soul! If he weren't, I told you everybody'd be on our side." Jan turned to Evanie. "See how dangerous the Master is? His charm strikes even through the words of his enemies!"

When they finally stopped for refreshments, Evanie described for Connor other wonders of the Master's world empire. She told him of the hot-house cities of Antarctica under their crystal domes, and especially Austropolis, of the great mining city in the shadow of the Southern Pole, and of Nyx, lying precariously on the slopes of the volcano Erebus.

She had a wealth of detail gleaned from the vision screen, but Jan Orm had traveled there, and added terse comment. All traffic and freight came in by rocket, the Triangles of Urbs, a means too expensive for general use, but the mines produced the highly-prized metal, platinum.

Evanie spoke, too, of the "Urban pond," the new sea formed in the Sahara Desert by the blasting of a passage through the Atlas Mountains to the Mediterranean. That had made of Algeria and Tripoli fertile countries, and by the increased surface for evaporation, it had changed even the climate of the distant Arabian Desert.

AND there was Eartheye on the summit of sky-piercing Everest, the great observatory whose objective mirror was a spinning pool of mercury a hundred feet across, and whose images of stellar bodies were broad-

cast to students around the world. In this gigantic mirror, Betelgeuse showed a measurable disc, the moon was a pitted plain thirty yards away, and even Mars glowed cryptically at a distance of only two and a half miles.

Connor learned that the red planet still held its mystery. The canals had turned out to be illusion, but the seasonal changes still argued life, and a million tiny markings hinted at some sort of civilization.

"But they've been to the moon," Evanie said, continuing the discussion as they got under way again. "There's a remnant of life there, little crystalline flowers that the great ladies of Urbs sometimes wear. Moon orchids; each one worth a fortune."

"I'd like to give you one some day," murmured Connor.

"Look, Tom!" Evanie cried sharply. "A Triangle!"

He saw it in the radiance of early dawn. It was in fact a triangle with three girders rising from its points to an apex, whence the blast struck down through the open center. At once he realized the logic of the construction, for it could neither tip nor fall while the blast was fed.

How large? He couldn't tell, since it hung at an unknown height. It seemed enormous, at least a hundred feet on a side. And then a lateral blast flared, and it moved rapidly ahead of them into the south.

"Were they watching us, do you suppose?" Evanie asked tensely. "But —of course not! I guess I'm just nervous. Look, Tom, there's Kaatskill, a suburb of the City."

The town was one of magnificent dwellings and vast lawns.

"Kaatskill!" mused Connor. "The home of Rip van Winkle."

Evanie did not get the meaning of that.

"If he lives in Kaatskill I never heard of him," she said. "It is a place where many wealthy Sleepers have settled to enjoy their wealth."

The road widened suddenly, then they topped the crest of a hill. Connor's eyes widened in astonishment at the scene unfolded.

A valley lay before them and, cupped in the hills as in the palm of a colossal hand, lay such a hive of mammoth buildings that for a moment reason refused to accept it. Urbs! Connor knew instantly that only the world capital could stretch in such reaches across to the distant blue hills beyond.

He stared at sky-piercing structures, at tiered streets, at the curious steel web where a monorail car sped like a spider along its silken strand.

"There! Urbs Minor!" whispered Evanie. "Lesser Urbs!"

"Lesser Urbs!"

"Yes. Urbs Major is beyond. See? Toward the hills."

He saw. He saw the incredible structures that loomed Gargantuan. He saw a fleecy cloud drift across one, while behind it twin towers struck yet higher toward the heavens.

"The spires of the Palace," murmured Evanie.

They sped along the topmost of three tiers, and the vast structures were blotted out by nearer ones. For an hour and a half they passed along that seemingly endless street. The morning life of Urbs was appearing, traffic flowed, pedestrians moved in and out of doorways.

THE dress of the city had something military about it, with men and women alike garbed in metallic-scaled shirts and either kirtles or brief shorts, with sandaled feet. They were slight in build, as were the Ormon folk, but they had none of the easy-going complacency of the villagers. They were hectic and hurried, and the sight struck a familiar note across the centuries.

Urbs was city incarnate. Connor felt the brilliance, the glamour, the wickedness, that is a part of all great cities from Babylon to Chicago. Here were all of them in one, all the great cities that ever were, all in this gigantic metropolis. Babylon reborn—Imperial Rome made young again!

They crossed, suddenly, a three-tiered viaduct over brown water.

"The canal that makes Urbs a seaport," Evanie explained.

Beyond, rising cliflike from the

bank, soared those structural colossi Connor had seen in the blue distance, towering unbelievably into the bright sky. He felt pygmylike, crushed, stifled, so enormous was the mass. He did not need Evanie's whisper:

"Across the water is Greater Urbs."

Those mountainous piles could be nothing less.

On the crowded sidewalks brilliant-costumed people flowed by, many smoking black cigarettes. That roused a longing in Tom Connor for his ancient pipe, now disintegrated a thousand years. He stared at the bold Urban women with their short hair and metallic garb. Now and again one stared back, either contemptuously, noting his Weed clothing, or in admiration of his strong figure.

Jan Orm guided the car down a long ramp, past the second tier and down into the dusk of the ground level. They cut into a solid line of thunderous trucks, and finally pulled up at the base of one of the giant buildings. Jan drew a deep sigh.

"We're here," he said. "Urbs!"

Connor made no reply. In his mind was only the stunning thought that this colossus called Urbs was the city they were to attempt to conquer with their Weed army—a handful of less than twenty-five thousand!

CHAPTER X

Revolution

WITH the cessation of the car's movement a blanket of humid heat closed down on them. The ground level was sultry, hot with the stagnant breath of thirty million pairs of lungs.

Then, as Connor alighted, there was a whir, and he glanced up to see a fan blower dissolve into whirling invisibility, drawing up the fetid accumulation of air. A faint coolness wafted along the tunnel-like street. For perhaps half a minute the fan hummed, then was stilled. The colossal city breathed, in thirty-second gasps!

They moved into the building, to a temperature almost chilly after the furnace heat outside. Connor heard the hiss of a cooling system, recognized the sibilance since he had heard it from a similar system in Evanie's cottage. They followed Jan to an elevator, one of a bank of fully forty, and identical to one of the automatic lifts in an ancient apartment building.

Jan pressed a button, and the cage shot into swift and silent motion. It seemed a long time before it clicked to a halt at the seventy-fourth floor. The doors swung noiselessly aside and they emerged into a carpeted hall, following Jan to a door halfway down the corridor. A faint murmur of voices within ceased as Jan pressed a bell-push.

In the moment of silence a faint, bluish light outlined the faces of Jan and Evanie; Connor standing a bit to the side, was beyond it.

"Looking us over on a vision screen," whispered Jan, and instantly the door opened. Connor heard voices.

"Evanie Sair and Jan Orm! At last!"

Connor followed them into a small chamber, and was a little taken aback by the hush that greeted his appearance. He faced the group of leaders in the room, half a dozen men and an equal number of women, all garbed in Urban dress, and all frozen in immobile surprise.

"This is Tom Connor," Jan Orm said quickly. "He suggested the rifles."

"Well!" drawled a golden-haired girl, relaxing. "He looks like a cool Immortal. Lord! I thought we were in for it!"

"You'd manage, Ena," said a striking dark-haired beauty, laughing disdainfully.

"Don't mind Maris." The blonde smiled at Connor. "She's been told she looks like the Princess; hence the air of hauteur." She paused. "And what do you think of Urbs?"

"Crowded," Connor said, and grinned.

"Crowded! You should see it on a business day."

"It's their weekly holiday," ex-

plained Evanie. "Sunday. We chose it purposely. There'll be fewer guards in the Palace seeing room."

For the first time Connor realized that Sundays passed unobserved in the peaceful life of Ormon.

Jan was surveying the Urban costumes in grim disapproval.

"Let's get to business," he said shortly.

There was a chorus of "Hush!"

The girl Maris added, "You know there's a scanner in every room in Urbs, Jan. We can be seen from the Palace, and heard too!"

She nodded toward one of the light-brackets on the wall. After a moment of close inspection Connor distinguished the tiny crystal "eye."

"Why not cover it?" he asked in a low voice.

"That would bring a Palace officer in five minutes," responded the blond Ena. "A blank on the screen sticks out like the Alpha Building."

SHE summoned the group close about her, slipping a casual arm through Connor's. In an almost inaudible whisper she began to detail the progress of the plans, replying to Jan's queries about the distribution of weapons and where they now were to Evanie's question about the appointed time, to inquiries from each of the others.

Evanie's report of the Messenger caused some apprehension.

"Do you think he knows?" asked Ena. "He must, unless it was some stray that passed near you."

"Suppose he does," countered Evanie. "He can't know when. We're ready, aren't we? Why not strike today—now—at once?"

There was a chorus of whispered protest.

"We oughtn't to risk everything on a sudden decision—it's too reckless!"

Ena presed Connor's arm and whispered, "What do *you* think?"

He caught an angry glance from Evanie. She resented the blond girl's obvious attention.

"Evanie's right," he murmured. "The only chance this half-baked revolution has is surprise. Lose that and you've lost everything."

And such, after more whispered discussion, was the decision. The blow was to be struck at one o'clock, just two hours away. The leaders departed to pass the instructions to their subordinate leaders, until only Connor and Evanie remained. Even Jan Orm had gone to warn the men of Ormon.

Evanie seemed about to speak to Connor, but suddenly turned her back on him.

"What's the matter, Evanie?" he said softly.

He was unprepared for the violence with which she swung around, her brown eyes blazing.

"Matter!" she snapped. "You dare ask! With the feel of that canary-headed Ena's fingers still warm on your arm!"

"But Evanie!" he protested. "I did nothing."

"You let her!"

"But—"

"*You let her!*"

Further protest was prevented by the return of the patrician Maris. Evanie dropped into a sulky silence, not broken until shortly Jan Orm appeared.

It was a solemn group that emerged on the ground level and turned their steps in the direction of the twin-towered Palace. Evanie had apparently forgotten her grievance in the importance of the impending moment, but all were silent and thoughtful.

Not even Connor had eyes for Palace Avenue, and the tumult and turmoil of that great street boiled about him unnoticed. Through the girders above, the traffic of the second and third tiers sent rumbling thunder, but he never glanced up, trudging abstractedly beside Evanie.

A HUNDRED feet from the street's end they paused. Through the tunnel-like opening where Palace Avenue divided to circle the broad grounds of the Palace, Connor gazed at a vista of green lawn surmounted by the flight of white steps that led to the Arch where the enormous diorite statue of Holland, the Father of Knowledge, sat peering

with narrowed eyes into an ancient volume.

"Two minutes," said Jan with a nervous glance around. "We'd better move forward."

They reached the open. The grounds, surrounded by the incredible wall of mountainous buildings, glowed green as a lake in the sun, and the full vastness of the Palace burst upon Connor's eyes, towering into the heavens like a twin-peaked mountain. For a moment he gazed, awe-struck, then glanced back into the cave of the ground level, waiting for the hour to strike.

It came, booming out of the Palace tower. One o'clock! Instantly the ground level was a teeming mass of humanity, swarming out of the buildings in a torrent. Sunlight glanced, flashing from rifle barrels; shouts sounded in a wild chorus. Swiftly the Ormon men gathered around Evanie, whose brilliant costume of green and crimson formed a rallying point like a flag.

The mob became an army, each group falling into formation about its leader. Men ran shouting into the streets on the broad avenue that circled the grounds, on the second and third tiers. Instantly a traffic jam began to spread to epic proportions. And then, between the vehicles, the mass of humanity flowed across the street toward the Palace.

From other streets to right and left, other crowds were pouring. The black-haired Maris was striding bare-limbed and lithe before her forces. White, frightened faces stared from a thousand stalled cars.

Then the heterogeneous mob was sweeping up the slope of grass, a surging mass converging from every side. The Palace was surrounded, at the mercy of the mob. And then—the whole frenzied panorama froze suddenly into immobility.

From a dozen doors, and down the wide white steps came men—Urban men, with glittering metallic cuirasses and bare brown limbs. They moved deliberately, in the manner of trained troops. Quickly they formed an inner circle about the Palace, an opposing line to the menacing thousands without.

They were few compared to the revolutionary forces, yet for a tense moment the charge was halted, and the two lines glared at each other across a few hundred feet of grassy slope.

THAT moment was etched forever in Connor's mind. He seemed to see everything, with the strange clarity that excitement can lend. The glint of sunlight on steel, the vast inextricable jam of traffic, the motionless thousands on the hill, the untold thousands peering from every window in every one of the gigantic buildings, the frowning towers of the Palace. And even, on a balcony of stone far up on the left tower, two tiny shining figures surveying the scene. The three Triangles hanging motionless as clouds high in the heavens. The vast brooding figure of Holland staring unperturbed into his black stone book.

"He's warned—he's ready!" Jan muttered.

"We'll have to fire," Evanie cried.

But before her command, the sharp rattle of rifles came from far to the right. Machine-guns sputtered, and all down the widespread line puffs of steam billowed like huge white chrysanthemums, and dissipated at once.

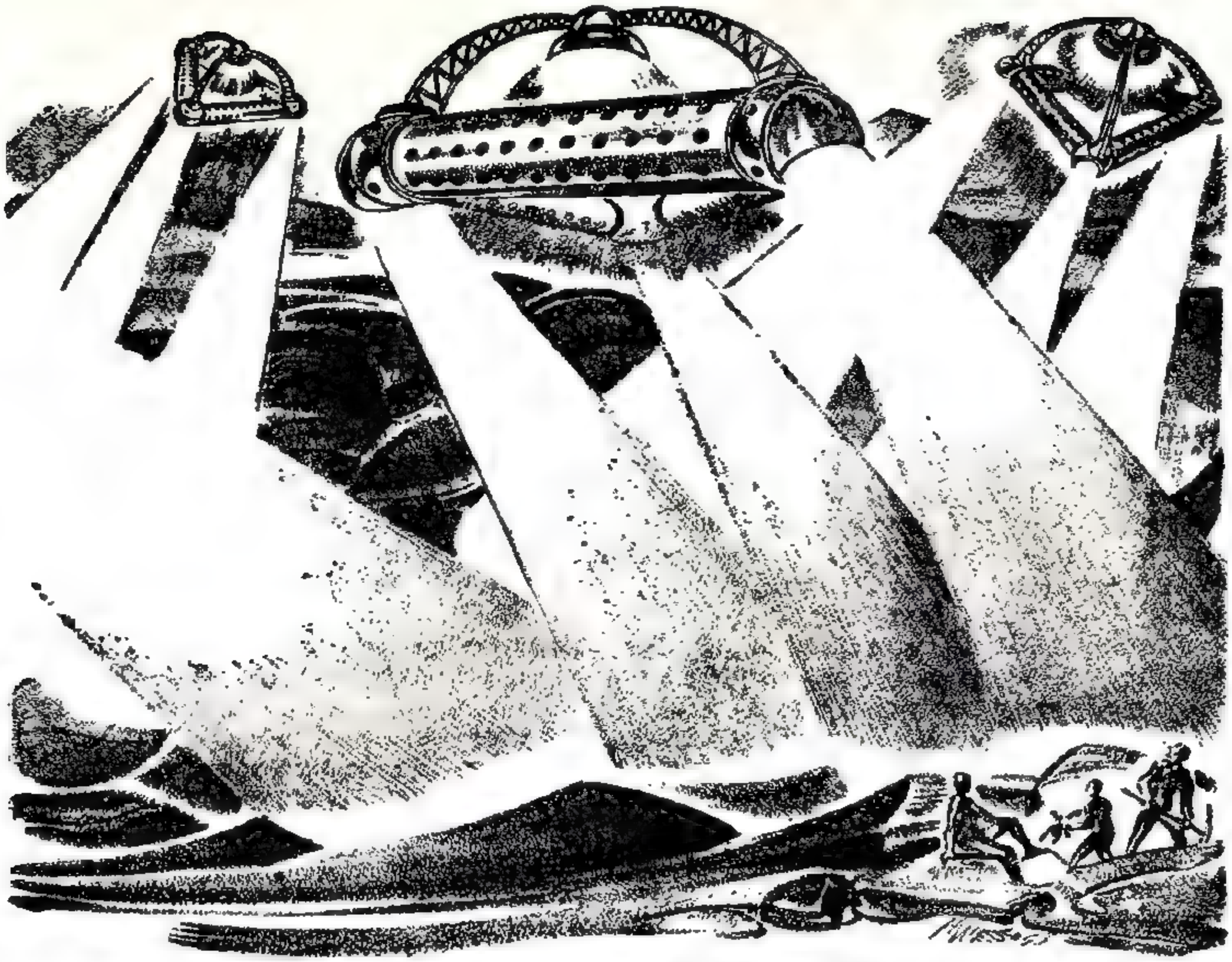
From a thousand windows in the bank of buildings burst other momentary clouds, and the medley of shouts punctuated by staccato explosions was like a chorus of wild music.

Connor stared thunderstruck. In the opposing line not a single man had fallen! Each stood motionless as the giant statue, left arm crooked across breast, right arm holding a glistening revolverlike weapon. Was marksmanship responsible for that—incredibly poor markmanship?

Imposible, with that hail of bullets! Puffs of dust spurted up before the line, splintered stone flew from the walls behind. Windows crashed. But not one Urban soldier moved.

"What's wrong?" Connor yelled.

"He knew." Jan Orm panted. "He's equipped his men with Paige deflectors. He's the devil himself!"



They had formed a new sea in the Sahara (Chapter IX)

The girl Maris leaped forward.

"Come on!" she shouted, and led the charge.

Instantly the line of Urbans raised their weapons, laying them across their bent left arms. A faint misty radiance stabbed out, a hundred brief flashes of light. The beams swept the revolutionaries. Anguished cries broke out as men spun and writhed.

Connor leaped back as a flash caught him. Sudden pain racked him as his muscles tore against each other in violent spasmodic contractions. A moment only; then he was trembling and aching as the beam flicked out. An electric shock! None should know that better than he!

Everywhere the revolutionaries were writhing in agony. The front ranks were down, and of all those near him, only he and Evanie were standing. Her face was strained and white and agonized.

Jan Orm was struggling to his feet, his face a mask of pain. Beyond him others were crawling away. Connor was astounded. The shock had been painful, but not that painful.

Halfway up the slope before the immobile line of Urbans lay the black-haired Maris. Her nerves had been unequal to the task set them, and she had fainted from sheer pain. The whole mass of the Weed army was wavering. The revolution was failing!

CHAPTER XI

Flight

CONNOR had an inspiration. The deflecting force must emanate from the glittering buttons on the Urban's left arms. Moreover, the field must be projected only *before* the Urban soldiers, else they'd not be able

to move their own weapons. Springing to a fallen machine-gun, he righted it, spun it far to the left so as to enfilade the Urbans, to strike them from the side.

He pulled the trigger—let out a yell of fierce joy as a dozen foemen toppled. He tried to shout his discovery to the others, but none heeded, and anyhow the Urbans could counter it by a slight shift of formation. So grimly he cut as wide a gap as he could.

The beams flashed. Steeling himself to the agony of the shock, he bore it unflinching. When it had passed, the Weed army was in flight. He muttered a vicious curse and jerked a groaning man on the ground beside him to his feet.

"You're still alive, you sheep!" he snarled. "Get up and carry that girl!" He gestured at the prostrate Maris.

The slope was clearing. Only half a hundred Weeds lay twisting on the grass, or were staggering painfully erect. Connor glared at the slowly advancing Urbans, faced them for a moment disdainfully, then turned to follow the flying Weeds. Halfway across the grounds he paused, seized an abandoned rifle, and dropped to his knee.

In a gesture of utter defiance, he took careful aim at the two figures on the tower balcony five hundred feet above. He pressed the trigger. Ten shots spat out in quick succession. Windows splintered above the figures, below, to right and left. Tom Connor swore again as he realized that these, too, were protected. Then he gritted his teeth as the ionic beam swept him once more.

When it ceased, he fled, to mingle with the last of the retreating Weed forces. They were trickling through, over, and around that traffic jam that would take heroic efforts to untangle.

The Revolution was over. No man could now reorganize that flying mob. Connor thrust his way through the mass of panic-stricken humanity until he reached the car in which Jan and Evanie were already waiting.

Without a word Jan swung the car hastily about, for the traffic snarl was reaching even as far away as he had parked. Evanie dropped her head on Connor's shoulder, weeping quietly.

"That's a hell of a revolution!" he grunted. "Twenty minutes and it's over!"

The car swept through the semi-dusk of the ground level of Palace Avenue to the point where the ramp curved about the base of the Atlas Building. There Jan guided it into the sunlight of the upper tier. In the afternoon glare his face was worn and haggard. Evanie, her spell of weeping over, was pallid and expressionless, like a statue in ivory.

"Won't we be stopped?" Connor asked, as Jan put on speed.

"They'll try," said Jan. "They'll block all of the Hundred Bridges. I hope we get across first. We can only hope, because they can see every move we make, of course. There are scanners on every street. We may be watched from the Palace now."

The bridge over which they had come into the city loomed before them. In a moment they were over the canal and into Urbs Minor, where ten million people still moved about their occupations in utter ignorance of the revolution and its outcome.

THE colossal buildings of Greater Urbs receded and took on the blue hue of distance, and Lesser Urbs slipped rapidly by them. It was not until they had surmounted the ridge and dropped into Kaatskill that Jan gave any evidence of relaxing. There he drew a deep breath.

"Respite!" he murmured goomily. "There are no scanners here, at least."

"What's to be done now?" asked Connor.

"Heaven knows! We'll be hunted, of course—everybody who was in it. But in Montmerci's rebellion the Master punished only one—Montmerci himself; the leader."

"Evanie's grandfather."

"Yes. That may weigh against her."

"This damned revolution was doomed from the start!" declared Connor irritably. "We hadn't enough organization, nor good enough weapons, nor an effective plan—nothing! And

having lost the advantage of surprise, we had no chance at all."

"Don't!" Evanie murmured wearily. "We know that now."

"I knew it the whole time," he retorted. "By the way, Jan—those Paige deflectors of theirs. Do you know how they work?"

"Of course." Jan's voice was as weary as Evanie's. "It's just an inductive field. And metal passing through it has eddy currents induced in it."

Simple enough, mused Connor. He'd seen the old experiment of the aluminum ring tossed by eddy currents from the pole of an alternating current magnet. But he asked in surprise:

"Against such velocities?"

"Yes. The greater the velocity, the stronger the eddy currents. The bullet's speed helps to deflect it."

"Did you know of these deflectors before?" snapped Connor.

"Of course. But projectile weapons haven't been used for so long—how could I dream he'd know of our rifles and resurrect the deflectors?"

"You should have anticipated the possibility. Why, we could have used—" He broke off. Recriminations were useless now. "Never mind. Tell me about the ionic beam, Jan."

"It's just two parallel beams of highly actinic light, like gamma rays. They ionize the air they pass through. The ionized air is a conductor. There's an atomic generator in the handles of the beam-pistols, and it shoots an electric charge along the beams. And when your body closes the circuit between them—Lord! They didn't use a killing potential, or we'd have been burned to a crisp. I still ache from that agony!"

"Evanie stood up to it," Connor remarked.

"Just once," murmured the girl. "A second time—Oh, I'd have died!"

It struck Connor that this delicate, small-boned, nervous race must be more sensitive, less inured to pain, than himself. *He* had stood the shock with little difficulty.

"You're lucky you weren't touched," said Jan.

Connor snorted. "I was touched three times—the third time by ten beams! If you'd listened to me we could have won the dog-fight anyway. I blew a dozen Urbans down by firing from the side."

"You *what?*"

"I saw that," said Evanie. "Just before the second beam. But I—I couldn't stand any more."

"It makes our position worse, I suppose," muttered Jan. "The Master will be angry at injury to his men."

CONNOR gave it up. Jan's regret that the enemy had suffered damage simply capped a long overdue climax. He was loathe to blame Jan, or the whole Weed army, for flying from the searing touch of the ionic beams. He felt himself an unfair judge, since he couldn't feel with their nerves. More than likely what was merely painful to his more rugged body was unbearable agony to them.

What did trouble him was the realization that he failed to understand

[*Turn page*]

these people, failed to comprehend their viewpoint. This whole mess of a revolution seemed ill-planned, futile, unnecessary, even stupid.

This set him to wondering about Evanie. Was it fair to try to bring love into her life, to rouse her from the reserve she had cast about herself? Might that not threaten unhappiness to both of them—these two strangers from different ages?

Humanity had changed during his long sleep; the only personality in this world with whom he felt the slightest sympathy was—the Master!

A man he had never even seen, unless one of the two shining figures on the tower had been he. Like himself, the Master was a survival of an earlier time. Therein, perhaps, lay the bond.

His musings were interrupted by a flash of iridescence in the air ahead. There was a long, desolate silence as the car sped onward.

"Well," Jam Orm at last said gloomily, "it's come."

But Connor already knew, instinctively, that what he had seen was the rainbow glint of one of the Master's Messengers.

"For which of us, do you suppose?" he asked soberly.

"For Evanie, I guess. But don't watch it—don't think of it. It might be for you."

Evanie was lying back in the seat, eyes shut, features blank. She had closed her mind to the unholy thing. But Connor was unable to keep either mind or eyes from the circling mystery as it swept silently about the speeding car.

"It's closing in," he whispered to Jan.

Jan reached a sudden decision. A rutted road branched ahead of them, and he swung the car into it, boring toward the hills.

"Weed village in here," he muttered. "Perhaps we can lose it there."

"How? It can pass through brick walls."

"I know, but the pneumatic freight tube goes through here. The tube's fast as a scared meteor. We can try it, and—" He paused grimly.

The sun was low in the west when they came to the village, a tiny place nestled among green hills. The ominous circling thing was glowing faintly in the dusk, now no more than twenty yards away. Evanie had kept to her resolute silence, never glancing at the threatening mystery.

IN the village, Jan talked to an ancient, bearded individual, and returned to the car with a frown.

"He has only two cylinders," he announced. "You and Evanie are going."

Connor clambered out of the car.

"See here!" he whispered. "You're in more danger than I. Leave me with the car. I can find my way to Ormon."

Jan shook his head. "Listen a moment," he said firmly. "Understand what I'm saying. I love Evanie. I've always loved her, but it's you that's been given to waken her. You must go with her. And for God's sake—quickly!"

Reluctantly Connor and Evanie followed Jan into a stone building where the nervous old man stood above two seven-foot cylinders lying on a little track. Without a word the girl clambered into the first, lying flat on her face with her tiny sandals pressed against the rear.

The ancient snapped down the cover like a coffin lid. Connor's heart sank as the man shoved the metal cylinder into a round opening, closed down a door behind it, and twirled a hissing handle. Jan motioned Tom Connor to the other tube, and at that moment the flashing iridescence of the Messenger swept through the room and away. He climbed hastily in, lying as Evanie had done.

"To Ormon?" he asked.

"No. To the next Weed village, back in the mountains. Hurry!"

CHAPTER XII

The Messenger

THE old man slammed the cover. Connor lay in utter darkness, but as he felt the cylinder slide along the

track, he thought he glimpsed for a bare instant the luminous Messenger in a flash through the metal sides. He heard the faint clang of the door, and there was a brief moment of quiet.

Then, with a force that bent his knees, he felt the thrust of terrific acceleration. Only a faint rumble came to his ears, but he realized that his speed must be enormous. Then the pressure shifted. He felt his hands driven against the front, and in a few more seconds, no pressure at all.

The cover was raised. He thrust himself out, to face Evanie, just clambering from her own cylinder, and a frightened nondescript man who muttered frantically

"Don't tell on me! Don't tell!"

He turned to listen to a low-voiced inquiry from Evanie, and answered in an inaudible whisper and a gesture to the north.

Connor followed Evanie as she hurried out of the building into darkness. He caught a faint glimpse of the stone cottages of a village smaller than Ormon, then they were trudging over a dim trail toward the hills black against the stars.

"To the metamorphs of the hills," Evanie said mechanically. "They'll hide us until it's safe." She added wearily, "I'm so tired!"

That was not surprising, after such a day. She started to speak. "You've been—Oh!"

He saw it too. The luminous needle-beaked shape that was the Messenger, circling them still twenty yards away.

"Lord!" he whispered. "How fast can that thing travel?"

"Disembodied electric force?" she asked wearily. "As fast as light, I suppose. Well—it doesn't matter. I can fight it off, if I must. But hurry!"

"God!" Connor groaned. "That persistent demon!"

His voice rose in a yell of surprise and fear. The misty thing had stopped in mid-air, poised a moment, then launched itself at his head!

There was no pain, just a brief buzzing. Connor realized that the needle-beak had thrust itself into his skull, and the horror rested above his shoulder. He beat at it. His hands passed through it like mist. And then, in a squeaky little voice that clicked maddeningly within his very brain, came the words of the Messenger.

"Go back to Urbs!" it clicked. "Go back to Urbs." Over and over. "Go back to Urbs!" Just that.

He turned frantic eyes on Evanie's startled face.

"Get it off!" he cried. "Get it off!"

"It was for you!" she whispered, stricken. "Oh, if it had only been for me! I can fight it. Close your mind to it, Tom. Try! Please try!"

He did try; over and over. But that maddening, clicking voice burned through his efforts: "Go back to Urbs! Go back to Urbs!"

"I can't stand it!" Connor cried frantically. "It tickles—inside my brain!" He paced back and forth in anguish. "I want to run! To walk until I'm exhausted. I can't—stand—it!"

"Yes!" Evanie said. "Walk until you're exhausted. It will give us time that way. But walk north—away from Urbs. Come."

SHE turned wearily to join him.

"Stay here," he said. "I'll walk alone. Not far. I'll soon return."

He rushed off into the darkness. His thoughts were turmoil as he dashed down the dim trail. I'll fight it off—*Go back to Urbs!*—I won't listen—*Go back to Urbs!*—If Evanie can, so can I. I'm a man, stronger than she—*Go back to Urbs! Go back to Urbs!*

Clicking — tickling — maddening! He rushed blindly on, tripping over branches, crashing into trees. He scrambled up the slope of a steep hill, driving himself, trying to exhaust himself until he could attain the forgetfulness of sleep.

Panting, scratched, weary, he paused from sheer necessity on the crest of the hill. The horror on his shoulder, clicking its message in his brain, gave him no surcease. He was going mad! Better death at the Master's hands than this. Better anything than this. He turned about and plunged toward the hill from which he had come. With his first step south, the maddening voice ceased.

He walked on in a relieved daze. Not even the dim mist of the Messenger on his shoulder detracted from the sheer ecstasy of stillness. He murmured meaningless words of gratitude, felt an impulse to shout a song.

Evanie, resting on a fallen log, glanced up at him as he approached.

"I'm going back to Urbs!" he cried wildly. "I can't stand this!"

"You can't! I won't let you! Please —I can rid you of it, given time. Give me a little time, Tom. Fight it!"

"I won't fight it! I'm going back!"

He turned frantically to rush on south, in any direction that would silence that clicking, tickling voice of torment.

"Go back to Urbs!" it ticked. "Go back to Urbs!"

Evanie seized his arm.

"Please—please, Tom!"

He tugged away and spun around. What he immediately saw in the darkness halted him. In a luminous arc, not three yards distant, spun a second Messenger—and in a mad moment of perversity, he was almost glad!

"Here's one for you!" he said grimly. "Now fight it!"

The girl's face turned pale and terror stricken. "Oh, no! No!" she murmured. "I'm so tired—so tired!" She turned frightened brown eyes on him. "Then stay, Tom. Don't distract me now. I need—all my strength."

It was too late. The second horror had poised itself and struck, glowing mistily against Evanie's soft bronze hair.

She stood frozen, only a low moan of anguish twisting her lips.

Connor felt a surge of sympathy that not even the insanity-breeding Messenger could overcome.

"Evanie!" he cried huskily. "Oh my God! What is it saying?"

Her eyes were wide and terrified.

"It says 'Sleep—Sleep!' It says 'The world grows dark—your eyes are closing.'" She clenched her fists in frenzy. "It isn't fair! I could fight it off—I could fight both of them off, given time! The Master—the Master wants me—unable—to help you."

Her eyes grew misty.

Suddenly she collapsed at his feet.

FOR a long minute Connor stared down at her. Then he bent over, gathered her in his arms, and moved out into the darkness toward Urbs.

Evanie was a light burden, but that first mile down the mountain was a torment that was burned into Connor's memory forever. The Messenger was still as he began the return, and he managed well enough by the starlight to follow the trail. But a thousand feet of mountain unevenness and inequalities of footing just about exhausted him.

His breath shortened to painful gasps, and his whole body, worn out after two nights of sleeplessness, protested with aches and twinges. At last, still cradling Evanie in his arms, he sank exhausted on the moss-covered bole of a fallen tree that glowed with misty fox-fire.

Instantly the Messenger took up its distractingly irritating admonition.

"Go back to Urbs!" it clicked deep in his brain. "Go back to Urbs! Go back to Urbs!"

He bore the torment for five minutes before he rose in wild obedience and staggered south with his burden.

But another quarter mile found him reeling and dizzy with exhaustion, lurching into trees and bushes, scratched, torn, and ragged. Once Evanie's hair caught in the thorns of some shadowy shrub and when he paused to disentangle it, the Messenger took up its maddening refrain. He tore the girl loose with a desperately convulsive gesture and blundered on along the trail.

He was on the verge of collapse after a single mile, and Urbs lay—God only knew how far south? He shifted Evanie from his arms to his shoulder, but the thought of abandoning her never entered his mind.

But the time came when his wearied body could go no further. Letting Evanie's limp body slide to the ground he closed his eyes in agony as the torturing voice of the Messenger resumed as he dropped beside her.

"I can't!" he croaked as though the Messenger or its distant controller could hear him. "Do you want to kill me?"

The sublimity of relief! The voice was still, and he relaxed in an ecstasy of rest. He realized to the full the sweetness of simple silence, the absolute perfection of merely being quiet.

He sighed, drawing in great breaths to fill his straining lungs.

He slumped full length to the ground, then, and in a moment was sleeping as profoundly as Evanie herself.

When Tom Connor awoke to broad day a heap of fruit and a shallow wooden bowl of water were beside him. Connor guessed that they had been placed there by the metamorphs that roamed the hills.

They were still loyal to Evanie, watching out for her.

He ate hungrily, then lifted Evanie's bronze head, tilting the water against her lips. She choked, swallowed a mouthful or two, but moved no more than that.

The damage to his clothing from his plunge through the darkness was slight.

His shirt was torn at sleeves and shoulder, and his trousers were ripped in several places. Evanie's soft hair was tangled with twigs and burrs, and a thorn had scratched her cheek. The elastic that bound her trouser leg to her left ankle was broken, and the garment flapped loosely. The bared ankle was crossed by a reddened gash.

He poured what remained of the water over the wound to wash away any dirt or foreign substance that might be in it. That was all his surgery encompassed.

CHAPTER XIII

The Trail Back

BY daylight the Messenger was only a blur, visible out of the corner of his eye like a tear in the eye itself. The demon on Evanie's shoulder was a shifting iridescence no more solid than the heat-waves above a summer road. He stared compassionately down on the still, white face of the girl, and it was at that moment that the Messenger took up its inexorable, clicking chant: "Go back to Urbs! Go back to Urbs!"

He sighed, lifted the girl in arms still aching, and took up his laborious journey. Yard by yard he trudged along the uneven trail. When the blood began to pound in his ears he rested again, and the silent Messenger on his shoulder remained silent. Only when his strength had returned did its voice take up the admonition.

Connor hated the Master now, hated him for these past hours of torture, and for the pallor of Evanie's cheeks, and her body limp in his arms.

The sun rose higher, struck down burning rays on his body. The perspiration that dampened his clothes was warm and sticky while he toiled along, and clammily cold while he rested. Shiny beads of it were on the brow of the unconscious girl, while his own face was covered with trickling rivulets that stung his eyes and bore salty drops to his lips. And the air

[*Turn page*]

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REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

was hot—hot!

Staggering south, resting, plowing on again, it was near sunset when he approached the Weed village where they had emerged from the pneumatic tube. A man digging before a cottage stared at him and fled through the door. On the steps of the building that housed the tube, half a dozen idlers moved hastily within, and he glimpsed the panic-stricken nondescript who had released him from the freight cylinder.

Connor strode wearily to the steps and deposited Evanie. He glared at the pale faces beyond the door.

"I want food," he snapped. "And wine. Do you hear? Wine!"

Someone slipped timidly past him. In a moment he was back with coarse brown bread and cold meat, and a bottle of the tart wild grape wine of the region. Connor ate silently, realizing that eyes peered at him from every window. When he had finished, he poured wine between Evanie's lips. It was the only nourishment he could give her.

"You in there!" he called. "Can any of you release us from these things?"

Evidently, that was a mistake. There was a terrified rustling within and a hurried exodus from some other door. The Messenger took up its refrain with maddening promptness. Abandoning hope of aid, once again he picked up Evanie and tramped into the darkness.

The demon on his shoulder finally let him sleep. It was just dawn when he awoke, and scarcely had he opened his eyes on this second morning of his tortuous trek when the clicking voice resumed its chant. He made no attempt to resist it, but rose and struggled on with his burden. Now he followed a clay road on which he could avoid tearing thorns and branches.

No more than a mile from the village he topped a rise to view a wide black highway, perhaps the same over which he and Jan Orm and Evanie had sped to Urbs—just two days ago! He found the rubbery surface somewhat less tiring and managed a little more distance between rests. But the journey was painfully slow. Yet the Messenger never hurried him. He was permitted ample rest.

NOW and again vehicles hummed past, mostly giant trucks. Occasionally a speeding machine slowed as if to stop, but one glimpse of the mistiness on his shoulder sent the driver whizzing on. No one, apparently, dared association with the bearer of that dread badge of the Master's enmity. It was with amazement, therefore, that Connor saw a truck actually stopping, and heard a cheerful invitation to "Come on in!"

He clambered laboriously into the cab, placing Evanie on the seat beside him, holding her against him. He thanked the driver, a pleasant-featured youth, and relaxed, silent.

"Weed trouble, eh?" the driver asked. He stared at Connor's shoulder.

"Say, you must be a pretty important Weed to rate a Messenger." He glanced sideward at Connor and suddenly grinned. "I know you now! You're the fellow that carried the beam when hell popped Sunday. Lord! Stood right up to the beam!" In his tone was deep admiration.

Connor said nothing.

"Well, you're in for it, all right," the youth resumed cheerfully. "You blew down some of the Master's men, and that's bad!"

"What did he do with the others?" Connor asked gloomily. "They couldn't all get away."

"He only picked up the leaders. Nine of 'em. Vision didn't say what he did. Papers say he released some of 'em. Girl who thinks she looks like the Princess."

Maris, thought Connor. And Evanie was the tenth of the decemvirate. He himself was tossed in for good measure. Well, perhaps he might bargain for Evanie's release. After all, he had something to trade.

It was mid-afternoon before they looked down on Kaatskill, and Connor realized in astonishment the distance over which they must have flashed in the freight tube. Then he forgot all else as Urbs Minor appeared with its thousands of towers and, far across the valley, the misty peaks that were

the colossus, Greater Urbs.

The truck kept to the ground level. The mighty buildings, shielded by the upper streets from sight, were less spectacular here, but their vast bases seemed to press upon the ground like a range of mountains, until Connor wondered why the solid earth did not sink beneath their weight. Millions upon millions of tons of metal and masonry—and all of it as if it rested on his own brain, so despondent did he feel.

Presently they were on Palace Avenue. Even the ground level of that mighty street was crowded. Connor already knew its almost lengendary reputation. What the Via Appia was to Rome, or Broadway to America of yore, Palace Avenue now was to the world. Main street of the planet; highway of the six—no, the seven—continents. For Antarctica was an inhabited continent now.

When the unbelievably magnificent Twin Towers came into clean view the truck came to a halt. Connor climbed out and turned to pick up Evanie.

"Thanks," he said. "You made the road to hell a lot easier."

The youth grinned.

"'S nothing. Good chances, Weed. You'll need 'em!"

Connor turned for the long ascent to the Palace. He trudged up the interminable flight of steps, passing crowds of Urbans who stared and gave him wide passageway. He moved close under the great, brooding, diorite statue of Holland, into the north doorway of the Palace, where a guard stepped hastily aside to admit him.

THROUGH a door to his right came the clatter and rustle of voices and machines, engaged in the business of administering a world government. To his left was a closed door, and ahead the hall debouched into a room so colossal that at first it seemed an illusion.

He strode in. Along the far wall, a thousand feet away, was a row of seats—thrones, rather—each on a dais or platform perhaps ten feet above the floor, and each apparently occupied. Perhaps fifty of them. Before the central one stood a group of people, and a few guards flanked it. Then, as he approached, he realized that all but the central throne were occupied only by images, by cleverly worked statues of bronze. No—two central thrones held living forms.

He pushed his way roughly through the knot of people, carefully deposited Evanie on the steps ascending to the seat, and glared defiantly at the Master.

For a moment, so intent was his gaze at the man he had come bitterly to hate, through all the torture of his forced trip, that he did not shift his eyes to the figure who sat beside the Master. The Princess of whom he had heard, he supposed—the beautiful cruel Margaret of Urbs who, with her brother, ruled with an iron hand.

But he was not interested in her now. Her immortal brother claimed all his attention, all his defiance. Just for a breath, though, Connor's eyes did flicker in her direction—and instantly he stood stockstill, frozen, wondering if at last he had lost his mind. For here, before his staring eyes, was the most incredible thing he had come upon in all this incredible new world! And what held him spell-bound was not so much the utter, unbelievable, fantastic beauty of the woman—or girl—who sat upon the throne of Urbs, as was the fact that he *knew* her! Gazing at her, frozen in utter surprise and fascination, Tom Connor knew in that moment that the cruel Margaret of Urbs and the inky-haired, white-robed girl with whom he had spent those unforgetable moments in the wildwood outside the village of Ormon were one and the same!

There could be no possible doubt of that, though in her emerald green eyes now was no friendly light as she looked down at him haughtily. In that same manner she might show her distaste for some crawling thing that had annoyed her. But not even her changed expression, not even her rich garb that had replaced her white robe of sylvan simplicity, could alter the fact that here before Tom Connor *was* his woman of the woods, his girl of

mystery, the girl who had unfolded to him the history of this more and more astonishing age into which Fate had drawn him.

Not by the slightest flicker of a long, black, curling eyelash did she show that she had even seen Connor before. But even in his own quick resentment that swiftly followed his frozen moment of surprise, the man from another age uncomfortably realized that her fascination for him, the sway of her bewildering beauty, was as great as it had been the first moment he had gazed upon her.

His own predicament—Evanie—everything—was forgotten, as if he were hypnotized.

Instead of a gauzy white robe that was in itself revealing, but with a touch of poetry and mysticism, she now wore the typical revealing costume of Urbs—rose bodice, and short kirtle of golden scales. And that hair of hers—never would Connor forget it—so black that it glinted blue in the light. Nor would he even forget her skin, so transparently clear, with its tint like the patina over ancient silver-bronze.

Looking at her now, Connor could see how Maris might claim a resemblance, but it was no more than the resemblance of a candle to the sun. Evanie was beautiful, too, but her loveliness was that of a human being, while the beauty of this girl who sat upon a throne was unearthly, unbelievable, immortal.

SHE sat with her slim legs thrust carelessly before her, her elbow on the arm of her chair, her chin in her cupped hand, and gazed indifferently from strange sea-green eyes into the vastness of the giant chamber. Never once did she glance at Connor after her first swift distasteful survey.

Her exquisite features were expressionless, or expressive only of complete boredom. Though there did seem to Connor that there was the faintest trace of that unforgettable mockery in the set of her perfect lips. Before he could tear his gaze away from her she moved slightly. With the movement something flamed on her breast—a great flower of seven petals that flashed and glistened in a dozen colors, as if made of jewels.

It took all of Connor's will power to keep his eyes from her, even though in that moment of long silence that had fallen in the throne room with his entry, he was resenting her, loathing her for what she was—instead of what he had thought her to be.

Deliberately he faced the Master, head up, defiant. Let the Master—let his Princess sister—do what they pleased. He was ready for them!

CHAPTER XIV

The Master

THE man at whom Connor stared, the man whose features he had seen before on Evanie's coin, seemed no older than the middle twenties. He was dark-eyed, and his black hair fell in a smooth helmet below his ears.

The eyes were strange, piercing, shrewd, as if they alone had aged, as if they were the receptacles of these centuries of experience. The mouth was set in a thin, cold line and yet, strangely enough, there was a faintly humorous quirk to its corners. Or not so strangely, either, decided Connor. A man *must* have a sense of humor to survive seven centuries.

And then a deep, resonant voice sounded as the Master spoke.

"I see, Thomas Connor," he said ironically, "that you received my Messenger hospitably." "And this is little Evanie!" His voice changed. "Good blood," he mused. "The mingling of the blood of Martin Sair with that of Montmerci."

Connor glared belligerently. "Release us from these vicious Messengers of yours, will you?" he demanded angrily. "We're here."

The Master nodded mildly, and spoke briefly into a mouthpiece on a black table beside him. There was a moment's pause, then a tingling shock as the unbound energies of the Messenger grounded through Connor's body. Evanie quivered and moaned

as the thing on her shoulder vanished, but she lay as quiet as ever.

Connor shook himself. Free! He flashed an angry frown at the impassive Master, but his eyes kept straying back to the Princess, who still not even glanced at him after that one first instant.

"Well," said the Master quietly, "your revolution was a trifle abortive, wasn't it?"

"Up to now!" snapped Connor.

His hatred suddenly overwhelmed him. The impulse for revenge shook him bodily. Swiftly stooping, he snatched Evanie's revolver from her belt, and held the trigger while twelve shots spat full at the Master's face in a continuous steaming roar.

The steam moved lazily away. The Master sat without change of expression, uninjured, while from far above a few splinters of glass from a shattered skylight tinkled about him. Of course, Connor reflected bitterly, the man would be protected by an inductive field. Glass had been able to pass through that inductive field, where Connor's bullets could not, but their glass was a dielectric.

He cast the empty gun aside and stared sullenly at the man on the throne. Then, despite his efforts, his gaze was again drawn to the Princess.

She was no longer looking abstractedly into vacancy. At the crash of the shots she had shifted slightly, without raising her chin from her hand, and was watching him. Their glances crossed. It was like the tingle of the Messenger's discharge to him as he met the cool green eyes, inscrutable and expressionless and utterly disinterested. And in them was no slightest hint of recognition! For reasons of her own she did not mean to recognize him. Well, two could play at that game.

"Your impulses take violent form," said the Master coldly. "Why do you, who claim to be a newcomer to this age, hate me so?"

"Hate you?" Connor echoed fiercely. "Why shouldn't I? Didn't you put me through two days and nights of hell with your damned Messenger?"

"But there would have been no torment had you obeyed immediately."

"But Evanie!" Connor snapped. "See what you've done to her!"

"She was interfering. I didn't want her here, particularly, but she might have released you from the Messenger. If you'd left her to herself, I would have freed her within a few hours."

"Kind, aren't you?" sneered Connor. "You're so confident in your own powers that you don't even punish revolt. Well, you're a tyrant, nevertheless, and some day you'll get more than you bargain for. *I* could have done it myself!"

He glanced again at the Princess. Was there the faintest flicker of interest in her imperious eyes?

"AND what would *you* have done," queried the Master amiably, "if you had been running the revolution?"

"Plenty!" retorted Connor. "In the first place, I'd never have shipped weapons into Urbs through the public tubes. You were bound to discover that, and surprise was our greatest ally. I'd have had 'em made right here, or near here. There must be Weed factories around, and if not, I'd have bought one."

"Go on," said the Master interestedly. "What else?"

"I'd have had a real organization—not this cumbersome leader upon leader pyramid. I'd have laid real plans, planted spies in the Palace. And finally, your deflectors. I didn't know of them, or we could have won even as things were. My—associates—forgot, rather carelessly, to mention them."

The Master smiled. "That was an error. If you had known of them, what would you have done?"

"I'd have used wooden bullets instead of metal ones," said Connor boldly. "Your induction field won't stop wood. And your ionic beams—why the devil couldn't we have used metal screen armor? We could have closed the circuit with that instead of with our bodies!"

He was aware, though he steadfastly refused to look at her, that the Princess was watching him now with un-

disguised mockery, her lovely lips parted in the ghost of a smile.

"True," said the Master with a curious expression. "You could have." He frowned. "I did not believe the stories I first heard of you—that you were a Sleeper who had awakened after a sleep of a thousand years. They were too fantastic for belief. I thought you were meaning to capitalize on the Sleep in some way known only to yourself—since I understand you had no bank deposit to draw interest for you and make you a wealthy man. Now I am inclined to believe you *have* come from another age—an age of wisdom—and you're a dangerous man, Thomas Connor. You're a brave man to bait me as you do, and a strong one, but dangerous; too dangerous. Yet I'm rather sorry your courage and strength has been bred out of the race."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to kill you," said the Master softly. "I'm sorry. Were it not for Evanie, I might be tempted to ask for your oath of allegiance and release you, but I can't trust a man who loves a Weed woman. It's a chance I dare not take, though I bitterly regret losing your blood and your ancient knowledge. If it consoles you, know that I intend to free Evanie. She's harmless to me. Any trouble she might cause can be easily handled. But you—you're different."

"Thanks," retorted Connor.

Like a compass needle his eyes did return to the face of the Princess, then. Even now, condemned to die for the second time in his strange life, he gazed fascinated at her, smiling at her with an echo of her own mockery.

"I don't suppose," said the Master hopefully, "that you'd consent to—say, marry Evanie, and perpetuate your blood before you die. I need that ancient strain of yours. Our race has grown weak."

"I would not!" Connor said.

"Tell me!" said the other in sudden eagerness. "Is it true, as an Ormon prisoner told us, and which I scorned to believe, having then no faith in this thousand-year Sleep, that you understand the ancient mathematics? Calculus, logarithms, and such lost branches?"

"It's quite true," snapped Connor. "Who told you?"

"Your Ormon chemist. Would you consent to impart that knowledge? The world needs it."

"For my life, perhaps."

The Master hesitated, frowning.

"I'm sorry," he said at last. "Invaluable as the knowledge is, the danger you, personally, present, outweighs it. I could trick you out of your secrets. I could promise you life, get your information, then quietly kill you. I do not stoop to that. If you desire, your knowledge goes to the grave with you."

"Thanks again," retorted Connor. "You might remember that I could have concealed my dangerous character, too. I needn't have pointed out the weakness in your defenses."

"I already knew them. I also know the weaknesses of Weed mentality." He paused. "I'm truly sorry, but—this seems to be the end of our interview." He turned as if to gesture to the guards along the wall.

MARGARET of Urbs flashed a strange, inscrutable glance at Connor, and leaned toward the Master. She spoke in low, inaudible tones, but emphatically, insistently. The Master looked up at Connor.

"I reconsider," he said coolly. "I grant you your life for the present on one condition—that you make no move against me while you are in the Palace. I do not ask your word not to escape. I only warn you that a Messenger will follow. Do you agree?"

Connor thought only a moment.

"I do."

"Then you will remain within the Palace." The Master snapped an order to a guard. "I will send doctors to attend little Evanie. That's all."

The guard, as tall a man as Connor himself, stepped forward and gathered Evanie in his arms. Connor followed him, but could not resist a backward glance at the Princess, who sat once more staring idly into space. But in his mind was the thought now, exultant in spite of his resentment, that at

least she had not forgotten him, or those hours together in the woods.

They moved into the hall, and into an elevator that flashed upward with sudden and sickening acceleration. He had glimpses of floor after floor through the glass doors as they mounted high into the North Tower.

The motion ceased. Connor followed the guard into a room lit by the red glow of sunset, and watched as he deposited Evanie on a white-covered bed, then turned, and threw open a door. "That is yours," the guard said briefly, and departed.

Luxury breathed through the perfumed air of the rooms, but Connor had no time for such observations. He bent anxiously over the pallid-faced Evanie, wondering miserably why the release of the Messenger had not awakened her. He was still gazing when a knock sounded, and two doctors entered.

One, the younger, set instantly to work examining the scratch on the girl's ankle, while the other pried open her eyes, parted her still lips, bent close to listen to her breathing.

"Brain-burnt," he announced. "Brain-burnt by a vitergon—the Messenger. Severe electrolepsis."

"Lord!" Connor muttered anxiously. "Is it—is it very serious?"

"Serious? Bah!" The older man spun on him. "It's exactly what happens to Sleepers—paralysis of the pre-Rolandic areas, the will, the consciousness. Like—if I'm properly informed—what happened to you! It might be serious if we let her sleep for half a century, not otherwise." He stepped to an ebony table beside the bed, decanting a ruby liquid into a tumbler. "Here," he said. "We'll try a good stiff stimulant."

He poured the ruddy fluid between Evanie's lips, and when the last drop had vanished, stood over her watching. She moved convulsively and moaned in agony.

"Hah!" said the doctor. "That'll burn some life into her!" The girl shuddered and opened dazed and pain-racked eyes. "So! You can handle her now," he called to the younger man, and moved out of the door.

"Evanie!" croaked Connor tensely. "Are you all right? How do you feel?"

The dazed eyes rested on him.

"I burn! Water—oh, please—water!"

CHAPTER XV

Two Women

TOM CONNOR glanced a silent question at the doctor. At his nod, Connor seized the empty tumbler and looked frantically for water. He found it beyond a door, where a silent stream gushed from the mouth of a grotesque

[*Turn page*]

face into a broad basin.

Evanie drank eagerly, thirstily, when he brought it to her. She stared bewilderedly about the luxurious room, and turned questioning eyes on Connor.

"Where—" she began.

"In Urbs. In the Palace."

Comprehension dawned.

"The Messengers! Oh, my God!" She shivered in fright. "How long—have I—"

"Just two days, Evanie. I carried you here."

"What is to—to be done with us?"

"I don't know, dear. But you're safe."

She frowned a moment in the effort to compose her still dazed and bewildered mind.

"Well," she murmured finally, "nothing can be done about it. I'm ashamed to have been so weak. Was he—very angry?"

"He didn't seem so." The memory of the Master's impassive face rose in his mind, and with it the vision of the exquisite features of the Princess.

"I suppose the girl who sits on his right is the Princess, isn't she?" he asked. "Who is she?"

Evanie nodded. "Every one knows that. On his left sits Martin Sair, the Giver of Life, and on his right—Why do you ask that?" She glanced up troubled, suspicious.

"Because she saved my life. She intervened for me."

"Tom!" Evanie's voice was horror-filled. "Tom, that was Margaret of Urbs, the Black Flame!" Her eyes were terrified. "Tom, she's dangerous — poisonous — deadly! You mustn't even look at her. She's driven men—I don't know *how* many—to suicide. She's killed men—she's tortured them. Don't ever go near her, Tom! If she saved you, it wasn't out of mercy, because she's merciless—ruthless—utterly pitiless!"

Scarcely conscious as yet, the girl was on the verge of hysteria. Her voice grew shrill, and Connor glanced apprehensively at the young doctor's face.

Evanie turned ashen pale.

"I—feel—dizzy," she choked. "I'm going—to—"

The doctor sprang forward. "You mustn't!" he snapped. "We can't let her sleep again. We must walk her! Quickly!"

Between them they dragged the collapsing girl from the bed, walking her up and down the chamber. A measure of strength returned, and she walked weakly between them, back and forth. Then, abruptly, they paused at the sound of a sharp rap on the chamber door.

The doctor called out a summons. Two Urban guards in glittering metal strode through the entrance, and stood like images on either side of it. One of them intoned slowly, deep as an anthem:

"Margarita, Urbis Regina, Sororque Domini!"

The Princess! Connor and the doctor stood frozen, and even Evanie raised weary eyes as the Princess entered, striding imperiously into the room with the scaly gold of her kirtle glittering crimson in the last rays of the sun. She swept her cold eyes over the startled group, and suddenly her exquisite features flashed into a flame of anger. The glorious lips parted.

"You fool!" she spat. "You utter fool!"

CONNOR flushed in sudden anger, then realized that the Princess addressed, not him, but the doctor at Evanie's left, who was fear-stricken and pallid.

"You fool!" repeated Margaret of Urbs. "Walking an electroleptic! Put her to bed—instantly. Let her sleep. Do you want to risk brain fever?"

The frightened physician moved to obey, but Connor interposed.

"Wait a moment." He shot an accusing glance at the Princess. "Do you know anything about this? Are you a doctor?"

He received a cool glance from her narrowed green eyes.

"Do you think," she drawled, "that I've learned nothing in seven hundred years?" And he alone caught the full implication of her words. She was subtly reminding him of how once be-

fore she had given him evidence of how vast was her knowledge. She turned imperiously. "Obey!" she snapped.

Connor stood aside as the doctor complied in panic.

"Where's Kringar?" the Princess demanded.

"Your Highness," babbled the medico, "he gave the girl a stimulant and left. He said—"

"All right. Get out." She nodded at the impassive guards. "You, too."

The door closed behind them. Margaret of Urbs bent over Evanie, now fully conscious, but pale as death. She placed a dainty hand on the girl's forehead.

"Sleep," she said softly.

"Leave me here alone, please," Evanie begged, trembling. "I'm afraid of you. I don't trust you, and I won't sleep. I'm afraid to sleep again."

Connor stood miserably irresolute. While he hesitated, the Princess fixed her eyes on Evanie's; they glowed emerald in the evening dusk as she repeated, "Sleep!"

He saw the fear vanish from Evanie's face, leaving her features as blank as those of an image. Then she was sleeping.

The Princess faced Tom Connor across the bed. She took a black cigarette from a box on the ebony table. It glowed magically as she removed it, and she blew a plume of perfumed smoke at him.

"Worried, aren't you?" she asked mockingly.

"You know I am."

"Well, rest your mind. I mean no harm to Evanie."

"But do you know what you're doing?"

She laughed, low laughter soft as rain in a pool.

"See here," she said, still with a taunt in her eyes, "I conceived the vitergons. Martin Sair created them, but *I* conceived them. I know what harm they can do, and I know the cure for that harm. Do you trust me?"

"Not entirely."

"Well, you have small choice." She exhaled another cloud of scented smoke. "Your little Weed is safe." She moved toward the adjoining room. "There's a bath in here," she said. "Use it, and then put on some Urban clothes. I'm inclined to dine with you this evening."

He was startled. He stared back at the mocking perfection of her face, but the green eyes carried no readable expression, as she came closer so that only Connor could hear what she said.

"Why?" he asked.

"Perhaps to recall a more pleasant meeting," she said gently. "Oh, I have not forgotten you—if that is what you are thinking. I recall every word of that day in the woods, but it may be better if you forget it; publicly. Margaret of Urbs does not care to have her private business broadcast to the city. Nor is it the affair of anyone here—or any business of yours—that I choose to get away from them all occasionally, with only the birds and the trees to bear me company. You will do well to bear that in mind, Thomas Connor!"

SUDDENLY her voice took on a taunting note, and the mockery in the emerald eyes was plain. "Perhaps," she said, "I have another reason for commanding you to dine with me. I may want to steal your knowledge—then kill you. I might have more than one reason for wanting to do that, but you fired a dozen shots at me on Sunday, Thomas Connor, as I stood on the balcony of the Tower. I do not fail to repay such debts."

"It will take more than you to steal what I will not give," he growled, and turned into his room, closing the door.

He stepped instantly to the hall door, opened it and gazed squarely into the impassive eyes of an Urban guard standing quietly opposite. So he was watched!

He turned back into the chamber, stripped, and entered the water of the pool, reveling in the refreshing coolness. As he bathed he could look out a window, and saw that the colossal Palace was built as a hollow square. Opposite him rose the mountainous spire of the South Tower, and far below was the wide pool and green-bordered walks of the Inner Gardens.

Drying his glowing body, he glanced distastefully at the sweat-stained pile of Weed clothing on the floor. In a closet he found Urban dress. It gave him a queer, masqueradelike feeling to don the barbaric metal corselet and kirtle, but the garments were cool, and befitted his great frame.

Ready at last, he flung open the door to Evanie's room.

Margaret of Urbs sat cross-legged on the bed, beside Evanie, smoking her black cigarette. Her green eyes passed appraisingly over Connor, and the glint of mockery was again in their depths.

"I always thought the ancient sculptors exaggerated their contemporaries' physiques," she said, smiling. "I was wrong. . . . But you're to kneel when you enter my presence, Thomas Connor. You didn't before."

"And I don't now. As an enemy, I owe you no such respect."

"As a gentleman you do, however. But never mind—I'm hungry. Come."

"Why can't we eat here? I won't leave Evanie."

"Evanie will be dull company for a dozen hours more. I'll send a maid to undress and bathe her."

"You're very considerate, aren't you?"

She laughed maliciously.

"I have no quarrel with her. But I have with you. Come!"

The glorious green eyes swept him. Both eyes and voice—a voice that now seemed to glory in malice—were so different from those of the girl of the woods that it was hard for Tom Connor to believe they were the same. But he knew they were. And now that he and she were alone every gesture seemed to admit that.

She rose without a glance at Evanie's still, white face and Connor followed her reluctantly past the guard, whose challenge she silenced with a peremptory word, and over to the bank of elevators.

"Where to?" he asked as the cage dropped, plummetlike.

"To a room of mine in the South Tower, I think. We'll have to go all the way down and walk across."

THE cage came to sickening halt. He followed her through the vast emptiness of the room of thrones, noting curiously that both her own throne and that of the Master were now occupied by cleverly executed bronze figures. He paused to examine the effigy of the Princess, wondering how long ago it had been cast.

"Third century," she said as if in answer to his thought. "Five hundred years ago. I was a child of two hundred and twenty then—and happier." Sardonic amusement was in her face and manner. "There was no Black Flame in those days. I was the madcap Princess Peggy then, reckless and daring, but sweet and noble. Or so they thought."

"I'm sure you deserved the reputation," Connor observed acidly. He meant to follow her lead in whatever she said or did. She would have no complaint that he was the first to mention their previous meeting. If she said no more about it, then it would not be mentioned at all.

She flashed her green eyes on him, eyes as icy as the green cap over Antarctica.

"I'm sure I deserve it no longer," she said in tones so cold that they startled. "Come on."

There was something fascinating, almost hypnotic, about this weirdly beautiful being.

"I'd rather dine with your image there," he remarked drily.

CHAPTER XVI

Immortality

MARGARET of Urbs laughed and led Connor through a door behind the line of thrones.

"Martin Sair's laboratory," she explained, gesturing at the chaotic confusion of glassware and microscopes. "And this"—passing into a chamber beyond—"is mine."

The place seemed more like a luxurious, sumptuously furnished library than a laboratory. There were shelves upon shelves of books, hundreds of

them obviously ancient, a great vision screen, a delicately inlaid desk, and here and there bits of statuary.

"Laboratory!" he echoed. "What do you do here?"

"I think. When I want to work I use Martin's." She picked up a white carving from the desk. "See here—some of your ancient work." She added a trifle sadly, "We have no artists able to create such beauty today. It's a tragedy that the arms were broken. During the Dark Centuries, I suppose."

Connor looked at the exquisite little ivory replica of the Venus de Milo and laughed.

"Arms broken!" he scoffed. "That's a copy of an ancient Greek statue of Praxiteles. The arms were broken two thousand years before my time!"

"A copy! Where's the original? I want it!"

"It was in the Louvre, in Paris."

"Paris is in ruins. Do you know where the Louvre stood?"

"Yes."

"Then tell me! I'll have it searched for. Tell me!"

He gazed into eyes sincerely eager; the eyes now of the white-clad girl of the woods who had lolled with him on a mossy woodland bank and told him stories of the ages. That girl had loved beauty, too; had been seeking it, matching her own reflection in the black pool. It amazed him that now in her rôle as the frigid princess she could still be so avid for beauty.

"That's a bit of information I withhold," he said slowly, "until I can trade it for something else I may want. Evanie's safety, or my own."

The mocking light returned to her eyes. "You amuse me, Weed!" she said curtly. "But very well." She led the way to the South Tower Elevators.

She was silent during the long ride to the very pinnacle of the tower. They emerged into a small chamber walled on every side in glass, and Connor stood awe-struck as the city spread out before them. The palace overtopped even the colossal structures around the Park. He gazed speechless at the mighty stretch of peaks outlined in light.

The Princess turned to a black-screened box.

"Send dinner to the tower," she ordered. "I want—Oh, anything. And send Sora to the room of Evanie Sair."

She flung herself carelessly on a purple couch along a glassed wall, and Connor seated himself.

"Now," she said, "What will you take for your knowledge?"

"I won't bargain with you. I don't trust you."

She laughed.

"You see me through Evanie's eyes, Tom Connor, and once—Well once I thought you were attracted to me. But no matter. We will not again speak of that time—though it does seem odd that Fate should have had me set my Triangle down where *you* were. When I was just wandering restlessly, aimlessly, seeking peace in loveliness. . . . It's too bad you fancy yourself in love with Evanie. For I assure you she doesn't love you."

"That's not true!" he flared.

SHE laughed, and instantly her touch of wistfullness was gone, to be replaced by wickedness.

"Be carefully," she mocked, "or I'll

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exact payment for that insult as well. But it was no lie."

He controlled his anger.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because when I forced her to sleep, frightened as she was, she didn't turn to you. She fought me herself. If she had loved you, she'd have instinctively called you for help."

"I don't believe you."

"Then you're a fool," she observed indifferently, and turned from him disinterestedly at the entry of two servants bearing food.

They slipped a table between the two and served a sumputous repast, with dishes Connor failed to recognize. He ate hungrily, but the Princess, despite her professed hunger, picked and chose and ate scarcely anything. It was a silent meal, but afterward, smoking one of the black, magically lighted cigarettes, he prepared to ask certain questions.

She forestalled him. With green eyes glowing sardonically, she looked straight at him.

"Why do you love Evanie instead of me?" she asked.

"You? Because you are not what I thought you were. Instead of being pure and sweet, you revel in evil. That is not hearsay; it is the historical record of your seven hundred years. For that I hate you, thoroughly and completely."

She narrowed her glorious eyes.

"Then you hate without reason," she said. "Am I not more powerful than Evanie, more intelligent, stronger, and even, I think, more beautiful?"

"You're outrageously, incredibly, fantistically beautiful!" he cried, as if the acknowledgement were wrenched from him against his will. "You're perhaps the most beautiful woman since Helen of Troy, and the most dangerous. And yet I hate you."

"Why?"

"Because of your lack of a little factor called character. I concede your beauty and your brilliance, but Evanie is sweet, kind, honest, and lovable. One loves character, not characteristics."

"Character!" she echoed. "You know nothing of my character. I have a hundred characters! No one can be so gentle as I—nor so cruel."

The faintest ripple of a mocking smile crossed her exquisite features, and then they were suddenly pure as an angel's. Without rising she kicked the switch of a vision screen with a dainty, sandaled toe.

"Control," she said as it glowed. A face appeared.

"A vitergon set tell to this room," she said cryptically, and then to Connor as the face vanished: "There is no scanner here. This chamber and Joaquin's in the North Tower are the only two in Urbs lacking them."

"What of it?"

"It means, Thomas Connor, that we are in utter privacy."

He frowned, puzzled. Abruptly he started back in his chair as a flash of iridescence flickered. A Messenger! And almost with his start the thing was upon him.

"Tell!" it creaked in his brain. "Tell! Tell! Tell! Tell!"

HE sprang erect.

"Take it off!" he roared.

"When I have your knowledge of Venus," his tormentor said carelessly.

"Take it off, or—"

"Or what?" Her smile was guileless, sweet, innocent.

"This!" he blazed, and covered the space between them in a bound, his right hand clutching the delicate curve of her throat, his left pressing her shoulders fiercely down against the cushions.

"Take it off!" he bellowed.

Suddenly there was a sound behind him, the grating of doors, and he was torn away, held by four grim-faced guards. Of course! The operator of the Messenger could hear his words. He should have remembered that.

The Black Flame pushed herself to a sitting position, and her face was no angel's, but the face of a lovely demon. Green hell glittered in her eyes, but she only reached shakily for the vision switch.

"Tell Control to release," she choked huskily, and faced Tom Connor.

The Messenger tingled and vanished. The princess rose unsteadily, but her glorious eyes burned cold as she snatched a weapon from the nearest guard.

"Get out, all of you!" she snapped.

The men backed away. Connor faced her.

"I should have killed you!" he muttered. "For humanity's sake."

"Yes, you should have, Thomas Connor." Her tones were bitter cold. "For then you would have died quickly and mercifully for murder, but now—now you die in the way I choose, and it will be neither quick nor merciful. I cannot"—her voice shook—"bear the touch of violence!" Her free hand rubbed her throat. "For this—you suffer!"

He shrugged. "It was worth it. I know your character now! I no longer have to guess."

Mockery gleamed.

"Do you?" Her face changed suddenly, and again it was soft and pure and wistful. "Do you?" she repeated, in tones that were sad, but held that bell-like quality he so well remembered. "You don't. Do you think the Black Flame is the true Margaret of Urbs? Do you realize what immortality means?" Her exquisite face was unutterably mournful as she thrust the weapon into her belt. "You think it's a blessing, don't you? You wonder, don't you, why Joaquin has withheld it from everybody?"

"Yes, I do. I think it's tyranny. It's selfish."

"Selfish! Oh, God!" Her voice shook. "Why, he withheld it from his own mother! Blessing? It's a curse! I bear it out of my duty to Joaquin, else I'd have killed myself centuries ago. I still may, do you hear. I still may!" Her voice rose.

Appalled, he stared at her.

"Why?" he cried.

"You ask why! Seven hundred years. Seven — hundred — years! Denied love! How do I dare love a man who ages day by day, until his teeth yellow and his hair falls out, and he's decrepit, senile, old? Denied children! Immortals can't have children. Don't you think I'd trade immortality for motherhood? Don't you?"

Connor was speechless. Her voice rose to a tense pitch.

"Do you know what seven hundred years mean? I do! It means seven centuries of friendlessness. Do you wonder that I run away to the woods sometimes, seeking the companionship, the friendship, the love, that everywhere else is denied me? How can I make friends among people who vanish like ghosts? Who among the dry scientists of the Immortals is alone — and I'm bored — bored — bored!" Her green eyes were tear-bright, but when he opened his lips to speak, she stopped him with an imperious gesture. "I'm sick to death of immortality! I want someone who loves me. Someone I'd love to grow old with, and children to grow up beside me. I want—I want—a friend!"

She was sobbing. Impulsively he

[*Turn page*]

Man Can Now Talk With God, Says Noted Psychologist

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moved toward her, taking her hand.

"My God!" he choked. "I'm sorry. I didn't understand."

"And you—will help me?" Her exquisite features were pleading, tear-streaked.

"The best I can," he promised.

Her perfect lips were two rosy temptations as she drew him toward her. He bent to kiss her gently—and sprang back as if his own lips had in truth touched a flame.

Laughter! He looked into mocking eyes whose only tears were that of sardonic mirth!

"So!" she said, her red lips taunting. "There is the first taste, Thomas Connor, but there will be more before I kill you. You may go."

CHAPTER XVII

The Destiny of Man

"YOU—devil!" Connor choked, and then whirled at a soft click behind him. A white envelope lay in a wire basket by the elevator.

"Hand it to me," said the Flame coolly.

He snatched it and thrust it at her, in a turmoil of emotion as he watched her read it.

"Indeed!" she murmured. "My esteemed brother orders me to keep well away from you—which I shall not do—and commands you to his quarters at once." She yawned. "Take the elevator to any floor below the Tower and ask a guard. That's all."

Yet, as the cage dropped, Connor could not forget that there had been something wistful about the Princess, at his last glimpse of her. Somehow, try as he would, he couldn't hate her quite whole-heartedly, and he frowned as he found his way to the West Chambers. A guard admitted him to an inner room, and then retired quietly, leaving him facing the Master, who sat behind a paper-littered desk.

"Well, what do you think of me?" the Master greeted him abruptly.

Connor was taken aback, unprepared for the question.

"Why," he stammered, "what would I naturally think of you? You dragged me back here by torture. You nearly killed Evanie. Do you think I can easily forget or forgive such things?"

"After all, Thomas Connor, you participated in a revolt against me," the Master said suavely. "You wounded eleven of my men. Did the governments of your day deal so leniently with treason?"

"I've wondered why you are so easy on the rebels," he admitted. "Frankly, in my time, there'd have been a good many of us lined up against a wall and shot."

The Master shook his head. "Why should I do that? The Weeds are the finest of my people. *I* made the only mistake—that of giving leisure to a race not ready for it. Leisure is what's bred all these minor revolutions. But does a father kill his favorite children?"

"Does a son kill his mother?" retorted Connor.

The Master smiled bleakly.

"I see my sister has been talking to you. Yes, I refused immortality to my mother. She was an old woman—ill, infirm. Should I have condemned her to added centuries of misery? Immortality does not restore youth."

The point was incontrovertible.

"Yet you withhold it from those who have youth," Connor protested. "You keep it selfishly as a reward, to bind to yourself all men of ability. You've emasculated the rest of humanity."

"You feel that immortality is a highly desirable reward, don't you?"

"I do! In spite of what your sister says."

"You don't understand," said the Master patiently. "We'll pass the question of its desirability; it doesn't matter. But suppose I were to open it to the race, to instruct all the doctors in its secrets. Wouldn't it immediately halt all development? How can evolution function if no one dies and no children are born?"

That was a puzzler.

"You could permit it after the birth of children," Connor said.

"I could. But at the present birth-

rate, the land areas would provide bare standing room in just a century and a half. I could then kill off nine-tenths of the population, presumably, but what of the famines and food shortages intervening?"

CONNOR was silent for a long moment.

"The fault's with immortality itself!" he burst out vehemently. "Men should never have learned that secret!"

"But they have learned it. Would you have me destroy the knowledge because fools envy it—and envy it mistakenly?"

"Did you summon me here merely to justify your acts?" Tom Connor snapped in reply.

"Exactly. You possess knowledge invaluable to me. I'd like to convince you of my sincerity."

"You never will."

"See here," said the Master, still in tones of calm gravity. "Don't ever doubt that I could steal your knowledge. I know ways to encompass it, and if I failed, others would not fail."

"The Princess tried that," said Connor grimly. "She will not try it again." He fingered a small bronze bust on the desk before him. "And incidentally, what's to prevent me from flinging this bronze through your skull right now—killing you, instead of waiting for you to kill me?"

"Your word to make no move against me in the Palace," reminded the Master gently.

Connor's lips tightened. In that moment he realized suddenly what it was that had perturbed him so violently. He was beginning to believe the Master—and he didn't want to! The memory of the Messenger's torture was too recent; the picture of Evanie's helplessness was too burning. He was being won over against his will, but—

"You win," he growled, releasing the bust. "Go ahead. Tell me what all this is leading up to. You must have some objective other than the indefinite perpetuation of your own power."

The Master smiled. "I have. I plan the ultimate destiny of Mankind." He held up a hand to still Connor's quick, unbelieving protest. "Listen to me. I have bred out criminals by sterilizing, for many centuries, those with criminal tendencies. I have raised the general level of intelligence by sterilizing the feeble-minded, the incompetent. If we have fewer supreme geniuses than your people, we have at least no stupid nor insane—and genius will come.

"I try, to the best of my knowledge, to improve the race. I think I'm succeeding. At least we're far advanced over the barbarians of the Dark Centuries, and even, I believe, over the average of your mighty ancient people. I think we're happier." He paused. "Do you?"

"In a way," Connor conceded. "But even happiness isn't always a fair exchange for—liberty!"

"Liberty? Suppose I granted liberty? Suppose I abdicated? How long do you think it would be before every sort of Weed village was at war with every other sort? Do you want the world to break up into another welter of quarreling little nations? That's what I found; out of it I've created an empire."

He drummed a finger on the desk, thoughtfully eyeing Connor.

"Moreover, I've preserved what differences I could. The yellow race was a remnant; I've bred it strong again. The red race was gone, but the black is growing. And the tag-ends of nations — I've nourished them."

"WHY?" Connor demanded. "Differences are only grounds for future trouble, aren't they?"

"Civilization grows out of differences. No race can produce a high culture by itself. There must be an exchange of ideas, and that means that there must be differences."

"You're very sure, aren't you?" Connor taunted.

"I've spent centuries thinking of it. I'm confident I've found the truth. And I do the best I can."

"I wish—" Connor paused. "I wish

I could believe you!"

"You can. I never lie."

"I almost feel I can. You're not the mocking devil your sister is. I rather like you."

A queer smile flickered on the Master's lips.

"I have instructed her to cease tormenting you. I assume she has been, but she'll keep away from you hereafter. . . . Won't you, my dear?"

Connor spun around. Lounging carelessly in the far doorway, a half-smoked cigarette in her hand, was the exquisite form of Margaret of Urbs.

"Perhaps," she drawled slowly and advanced leisurely into the room, seating herself casually on the desk regardless of its litter of papers.

"Joaquin," she remarked, "this man neglects to kneel in my presence. In yours as well, I perceive. Shall I command him?"

"Try commanding the statue of Olin," snapped Connor.

"We could persuade him," insinuated the Princess. "After all, Evanie Sair is our hostage."

"Be still!" the Master said sharply. "You know I never impose a custom on those who reject it."

The Princess turned taunting eyes on Tom Connor and was silent. "With your permission I should like to retire," he said. "We seem to have covered the ground."

"Not entirely," said the Master.

"What more do you want of me?"

"Two things. First, your knowledge. Your understanding of the ancient mathematics, and whatever else we need."

"Granted—on condition." At the Master's inquiring look he said boldly: "On condition that any knowledge I impart be made public. You have enough secrets—though some of them are apt not to remain so!"

"I'll agree," the Master said promptly. "That was always my intention. But what secret of mine is in danger of exposure?"

Connor laughed. "What else was it you wanted of me?"

"Your blood. Your strain in the race, like an infusion of bulldog blood to give greyhounds courage. I want you to marry and have children."

"And that," said Connor bluntly, "is my personal business. I refuse to promise that."

"Well," the Master genially remarked, "we'll let Nature take its course. I'll trade you that indulgence for the revelation of what secret you suspect."

"Done! It's the Triangle rocket-blasts."

"The rocket-blasts!"

"Yes. I've heard your craft in flight. I've listened to the blasts." He turned sardonic eyes from the Master to the Princess. "The blast isn't steady. It throbs. Do you understand? It throbs!"

THE Master's face was stern. "Well?"

"I know you can't control the rate of power. You've had the whole world looking for a means of controlling the *rate*. That's impossible. Hydrogen has its natural period like radium. You can release the energy at that single rate or all at once, as in our rifles—but you can't control it otherwise!"

There was silence.

"I know what you do in the blast. You detonate your water—a little at a time in an enormously strong firing chamber, and release the blast gradually. It's no more continuous than the power of a gasoline engine!"

"You're endangering your life!" whispered the Master. "You can't live now!"

"With her Satanic Majesty, the Goddess of Mockery, to intercede for me?" Connor jeered, staring steadily into the gray-green eyes of the Princess. In her features now was no slightest trace of a taunt, but something more like admiration. "If I'm to die, it had better be here and now, else I'll find a way to tell what I know!"

"Here and now!" said Margaret of Urbs.

"Not yet," said the Master. "Thomas Connor, long ago in my youth I knew men like you. They're dead, and it's a great loss to the world. But you're living. I don't want to

kill you. I'd rather trust the fate of my empire to your word. Having heard my side, then, will you swear allegiance to me?"

"No. I'm not sure of your sincereity."

"If you were, would you?"

"Gladly. I see more with you than with the Weeds."

"Then will you swear not to oppose me until such time as you are sure? And will you swear to keep that knowledge you have to yourself?"

"Fair enough!" Connor said, and grinned. He took the bronzed hand the Master extended. "I swear it." He glanced coolly at the Princess. "And by the three kinds of metamorphs, I'm glad to swear it!"

"Two kinds," corrected the Master mildly. "Panate and amphimorph."

But Margaret of Urbs caught his meaning. A faint trace of anger glinted in her eyes.

"The Immortals," she said coldly, "do not consider themselves metamorphs."

"Then I don't consider myself Irish," said Thomas Connor. "Any freak that comes out of Martin Sair's ray is a metamorph to me."

"Enough," said the Master. "That's all, Connor."

But at the door the Princess halted Connor, and he gazed down into her upturned face.

"Do you believe," she said coldly, "that Joaquin's promise will protect you—or Evanie Sair—from me? I have my own debt to collect from you."

He glanced back at the impassive figure at the desk.

"I traded my knowledge for your word," he called to the Master. "Is it good?"

"I am the Master," said that individual calmly.

Connor gazed again at the perfect features of the Flame. Slowly he raised his hand, holding her eyes with his. And then, with a sharp gesture, he snapped his finger stingingly against her dainty nose, grinned, and strode away.

At the outer door he turned. The Black Flame, her lovely face a pale mask of fury, held a beam-pistol in her hand, but she made no move as he grinned back at her. Behind her the Master smiled cryptically down at the point of his pen.

But back in his room, an amazing realization came to Connor. Under the guise of his mildness, the Master had won every single point! He had extracted from Connor the promise of his knowledge, the promise of secrecy concerning the Triangle blasts, his alienation from the Weed cause, and more than half an oath of allegiance to himself!

And all for—what? The right of Thomas Connor to bear his own children, and the same promise of safety given at their earlier meeting!

He swore softly and lay thinking of the mocking loveliness of the Black Flame.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Sky-Rat

CONNOR awoke fully rested, with the ache from muscles strained by Evanie's weight almost vanished. He arose, bathed, donned his glittering Urban costume, and looked into Evanie's room.

The girl was awake at last, and apparently well on toward recovery. He breathed a deep sigh of relief. At least in one matter, then, the unpredictable Princess had been sincere.

"Evanie!" he murmured. "Are you really all right? Are you better?"

She smiled and nodded. "I feel almost myself."

"Well, we misjudged the Princess in one respect, then. I'll have to thank her for pulling you through."

Evanie's eyes widened in horror.

"Thank her! What do you mean? Tom—have you—did you see her while I—"

He was taken aback.

"Why, I had dinner with her."

"After I warned you!" she wailed. "I tell you she's like a madness that gets into your blood. A man can't even look at her without suffering—and

she's cruel and utterly inhuman." She compressed her lips firmly and whispered:

"There's a scanner here—right under the light. I mustn't talk like this."

"Who cares? She won't get into my blood, Evanie. I've met only two Immortals. The Master I like. The Princess—I hate!"

"See!" she whispered. "You like the Master! Tom, he's as bad as the Princess. He's subtle, scheming, insidious! His charm is poisonous. Don't let him talk you over—please!"

He was startled at her vehemence. But the Master had his word now. Could he break it? He was more than half convinced of the great ruler's sincerity. After all, Evanie was only a sweet, impulsive country girl whose grandfather had been killed. Something of his thoughts must have shown in his expression, for her face grew suddenly hard.

"If I believed you were turning away from us to them," she said tensely, "I'd despise you, Tom. But I believe in you! Believe you're strong enough to resist the trickery of the Immortals. Don't fail me."

He could not answer her then, for the maid, Sora, came in with a tray of food. She placed it on a cleverly constructed swinging arm that held it above the bed. It was a silent meal. Sora's presence put a restraint on them, and Evanie was cold, eyeing Connor suspiciously.

He was relieved when they finished and the woman departed with the tray. He found a box of the magically self-lighting cigarettes, and puffed moodily, while Evanie watched him in silence.

A rap sounded. A Palace guard entered, bowed, and handed Connor a tiny package and an envelope sealed with the imprint of the Midgard Serpent, and departed.

Connor broke the seal and slipped a card from within, read it, and whistled. There was a queer expression on his face when he handed it to Evanie. Written on it in script as fine and precise as engraving were the two sentences:

We desire your presence at once in our laboratory in the East Chambers. Show our medallion to the guard at your door.

Margarita, Urbis Regina, Sororque Domini.

THE royal "we." It was no invitation, but a command. Connor stared at Evanie, who stared back with narrowed eyes.

"Well?" he said at last.

"Well?"

"What can I do? Ignore it and expose both of us to her anger—if she's such a devil as you say?"

"Oh, go!" snapped Evanie. "You and your ancient strength and courage! You're like any other man before the Black Flame of Urbs—just a fool! Go!"

"And leave you?"

"I'll have Sora for company," she retorted. "Go ahead. Burn yourself at the Flame, and see if I care."

"I don't see what else I can do than go," he muttered unhappily.

He turned moodily to the door, stripping the wrapper from the tiny package. A beautifully cast golden disc lay in his hand, with the pure features of the Princess in high relief.

The guard outside challenged him at once. It gave him a grim pleasure to flash the medallion in the fellow's face, to see him salute amazedly and step aside. Connor took the elevator to the ground floor, and passed moodily into the vast cavity of the Throne Room.

He passed through Martin Sair's disorderly chamber and finally to his destination. Margaret of Urbs sat with a glass of purple wine in one hand and the inevitable cigarette in the other, her dainty sandaled feet on a soft footstool. She wore Urban dress of glistening silver, above which her black hair gleamed like metal. She gave him a sardonic smile.

"You may kiss my sandal," she said.

"Or the hem of your skirt," he retorted. "Why did you send me that note?"

She gestured at the vision screen beside her.

"Mostly to watch you and Evanie quarrel over it."

"Then you know my opinion of

you."

"Yes. I was rather amused."

"Well, if you've ceased to be amused, may I go back?"

"Not immediately," said the Princess. "Don't you think I owe you a little amusement in return?"

"I'll forgive the obligation."

"But I'm very circumspect about my debts," she insisted, with that maddening twinkle of mockery in the eyes that dared him. "Isn't there anything about the Palace—or in the world—that interests you? I'll take you sightseeing."

IT was an opportunity, at that. There certainly was much he would like to see in this world that had grown up a thousand years after he was born. He hesitated. The inky-haired girl gestured at a chair and he sat down. Without permission he poured himself a goblet of the wine beside her. It was quite different from the still wines of Ormon; sweet, sparkling, rich—and potent.

"I'd like to see Eartheye," he said, musingly.

"Oh, Asia's too far!" she quickly protested. "I'm only giving you an hour or so."

"Let's have something on the vision screen from Eartheye, then," he suggested. "How about Mars?"

"Well, it's night over Asia." She snapped the screen on with a negligent hand and said, "Eartheye." In a moment a bearded face appeared with a respectful salute. "Put on Mars," she drawled. "The central region of Solis Lacus."

In a moment a rosy glow suffused the screen, resolving into focus as a ruddy plain with a greenish center. Connor gazed spellbound. The planet of mystery at a distance of two miles!

Enigmatical dark spots of strangely suggestive regularity were distinguishable, a lacy tracery of cabalistic lines, the flash of something bright that might be water. A pygmy civilization? He wondered dizzily.

"I'd like to see *that* at first hand!" he murmured.

"So would I," said Margaret of Urbs. "I've tried to talk my esteemed brother into permission to make the attempt, without success so far."

"You?" He remembered his conversation with Evanie and Jan Orm. "But it's two and a half years there and back!"

"What's two and a half years to me?" She snapped off the screen. "Come on," she said rising.

"Where now?"

"For a little flight. I'll show you a Triangle"—she glanced at him with a mocking smile—"since you know their secret—and yet live!"

"No thanks to you!" Connor flashed at her.

"No. Were you frightened?"

"Did I seem so?"

She shook her head.

"Are you ever afraid?"

"Often. I try not to show it."

"I never am," she said, pulling a beam-pistol from a table drawer and snapping it to her waist. "Since we're leaving the Palace," she explained. "I intend to bring you back."

He laughed and followed her through the Throne Room and up to a portion of the vast Palace roof below the South Tower. A Triangle stood there on a metal flooring. He noticed the pitting and excoriations where the blast had struck. The vehicle gleamed silver, far smaller than the giant ones he had seen in flight. Connor glanced curiously at the firing chamber at the apex, then at the name *"Sky-rat"* engraved on the wall.

"My *Sky-rat*," said Margaret of Urbs. "The swiftest thing yet made by man. Your bullets are laggards beside it." She hesitated, and for a moment he could have sworn that there was a touch of shyness in her eyes. "I took one trip in this—not so long ago," she said softly, "that I will never forget. The woods of Ormon are—lovely—don't you think?"

He made no answer to that, and followed her in. The tubular chamber was luxuriously fitted, with deep cushioned seats and room enough for comfortable sleeping quarters. When they were seated she depressed a lever and the throbbing roar of the blast began.

Through the floor-port he watched

the Palace drop away. Urbs Major unrolled beneath. There was a sensation of weight as the vehicle shot upward like an errant meteor.

"Frightened?" laughed the Princess.

Connor shrugged. "I've flown before," he said laconically.

"Oh—airplanes! Wait!"

CHAPTER XIX

Death Flight?

MINUTE by minute the Earth receded. It seemed not so much to drop as to diminish, as if the surface were condensing like a deflating balloon. Urbs Minor slipped smoothly into the square of vision and the whole panorama of the mighty city was below—Greater and Lesser Urbs with the gash of the canal between them, tiny as a toy village in the Swiss Alps.

Kaatskill slid into the square, and a dozen other previously unseen suburbs of the vast metropolis. The aspiring towers of the Palace were small as pins in a carpet, and already a little east of them, as their radial flight permitted the Earth's rotation to gain on the craft.

The Earth began to seem hazy, and off to the north a snow-white plain of clouds glistened. The vast bowl of the planet began slowly to hump in the center. It was inverting, beginning to seem spherical.

Tom Connor jumped violently as a spark crackled off his thumb. A second stung the tip of his nose. The black silken hair of the Princess rose queerly in a cloud about the perfection of her face, and sparks raced along the metal of the hull.

"The Heaviside ionization layer," she murmured. "Scared?"

"No."

Margaret of Urbs glanced at a dial. "Thirty thousand now."

"Feet?"

She laughed. "Meters."

About twenty miles. And they were still accelerating. The surface below flowed continually inward. The sky darkened; a star appeared—another. Fifty stars; a thousand—all glistening in a black sky where the sun blazed blue-white. The Earth was decidedly globular now. The vast, inconceivable slope of the planet could be seen in all directions.

Unconsciously Connor jumped as suddenly there came a sharp patter like hail.

"Meteoric particles," said the girl, turning a knob. "Paige deflector," she explained.

"For meteors as well as bullets, eh?" he suggested.

"For the iron ones. A stone might get through."

Uncomfortable thought. Minutes passed—half an hour. Suddenly the Princess moved something. Connor was nearly lifted from his seat by the sudden lightness.

"Deceleration," she said, glancing down at the colossal convexity below. "Three hundred miles. Are you frightened?"

"Do *you* think so?"

She smiled a taunt. "I'll turn off the deflectors," she murmured.

There was a pattering roar. Something crashed glancingly above him and the floor tipped and spun like a juggler's platter. Margaret of Urbs laughed.

"Might I ask the object?" he queried.

"Yes," she said gently. "I'm going to commit suicide!"

As he caught his breath sharply, unbelievingly, she moved the lever before her, and the throbbing roar of the blast died suddenly. The sensation of dizziness that followed was a thousand times worse than that Connor had experienced in the swift Palace elevators.

He was utterly weightless. They were in a free fall!

The Princess was laughing at him. Deep in those lustrous, inhumanly lovely sea-green eyes of hers was the glint of mockery.

"Scared?" she whispered, as she had done repeatedly, and gave a low rippling chuckle at his silence. "Three hundred miles!" she jeered. A moment passed. "Two hundred!"

HE couldn't shift his gaze from the satanic beauty of her face, but he grimly fought his quivering lips to firmness. There was a low whine outside that rose abruptly to a screaming shriek that went gibbering across the world. The air! They had struck the atmosphere.

The floor grew warm, almost hot—it burned. At last Connor tore his eyes from the face of the Princess and gazed down at the up-rushing planet.

They were over ocean. What matter? At that speed it might as well be concrete. How high? Two miles—a mile? Less each succeeding second. The scream was a great roaring now.

"We're going to crash," he said evenly, knowing she couldn't hear him.

Margaret of Urbs kicked a lever with a daintily casual foot. The blast roared out—too late! Or was it? Irresistible weight oppressed Connor as the sea rushed upward. So close it was now that he saw the very waters hollowed by the blast. That near!

But far enough. They were receding until the girl cut the blast again and set the rocket gently on the heaving swells of the Pacific.

Connor gulped.

"Nice flying," he said steadily. "How often can you do it?"

"I don't know," she laughed. "I've never tried before. Scared?" The reiteration of that word was getting on his nerves as greatly as had the speed of the rocket.

"Did I show it?" he asked.

"I'm afraid not." Her voice changed suddenly. She rose, whipped the beam-pistol from her side. "If I can't frighten you," she said, her eyes glittering, "I can at least kill you!" The beam flashed over him.

He took the shock unflinching. She slid her finger along the barrel until it stabbed harder, racking him. He bit his lips and gazed back into eyes, now deeply emerald. And at last she laughed and returned the weapon to its place.

"Were all ancients like you, Tom?" she murmured.

Somehow he managed a calm reply.

"Some stronger, some weaker," he said carelessly.

"I think I could—love you," she whispered.

She thrust a hand suddenly toward him and involuntarily he started.

"Afraid of one thing, at least, aren't you?" she jeered. "Afraid of—me!"

Without warning he caught her arm, swept her suddenly to him. He pressed a fierce kiss on the perfection of her lips. She yielded instantly, returning the caress. For a moment her lips burned against his like strong wine, and lights coruscated in his spinning brain. With the Black Flame of Urbs in his arms, the world seemed to fall away as it had from the rising Triangle.

He felt her lips move against his, heard her murmur: "Tom! Tom! I do love you. Say you love me!"

"Love you? Love you?" he said. But just in time he caught that familiar gleam of mockery in her eyes. "Yes," he said. "Just as I love a drink of strong liquor!"

He pushed her roughly away, grinning sardonically. Margaret of Urbs laughed, but he fancied there was a quaver in her laughter. It was the first time he had seen the diamond hardness of her poise so much as ruffled. That is, since he had seen her in her robe of cruel Princess, the role she had played for seven hundred years. When he had seen her as a child of the woods she had been different.

BUT she quickly regained her hard control over herself. She slapped a trifle viciously at the controls, and the *Sky-rat* soared away from a boiling circle of ocean toward Urbs.

Arrived there, the Princess said not a word, but left Tom Connor at once. He wandered irresolutely to his room and opened Evanie's door. She sat propped against some cushions while a man in the garb of a Palace servant leaned above her. Both turned startled faces toward him. In amazement he recognized the man as Jan Orm of Ormon!

Tom Connor opened his mouth to cry an involuntary greeting to Jan Orm, but checked it at the sight of

Jan's warning look and a gesture from Evanie. Of course! Jan was here in disguise, and there was the scanner with unwinking eye and attentive ear. Connor advanced to the side of Evanie's bed and bent over her.

"Don't look at Jan when you talk," she said softly.

"I won't. Lord, I'm glad to see you, Jan! I didn't know what might have happened to you."

"I'm working in the kitchen," whispered Jan, nodding at a tray on the wall-arm. He added eagerly: "Tom, you can help us! We need you."

"Help you to what?"

"To finish—" Jan began, but Evanie interrupted. "Help me to escape," she whispered, then shot a glance at Jan Orm. "Be careful of him, Jan," she warned. "He's been around the Black Flame."

Connor reddened. "Look here!" he muttered. "Here's exactly how I stand. For safety's sake, I've sworn to the Master to make no move against him for the present, and to tell him what I know of mathematics. That can't hurt you, can it? Evanie's safety is worth more to me than that."

He caught a sidelong flash of Jan's face gone suddenly blank. Jan's lips tightened grimly.

"What's the value of an oath to the Master?" he growled. "That needn't bind you!"

"I keep my word," Connor said, as grimly.

"But your oath doesn't keep you from helping me to escape, does it?" whispered Evanie.

"I guess not—but what's the use of it? To suffer another Messenger?"

"This time," declared Evanie, "I'll fight off any Messenger. I was worn out before, exhausted, almost helpless."

"What can I do?" asked Connor, a little reluctantly.

"Are you free to move as you will about the Palace?"

"Not entirely."

"Well, I want to see the Master. I *must* see him."

"Why don't you call him and ask for an interview?" Connor asked. That seemed simple enough.

"I have. All I can get is a statement from the vision room that he's busy in his quarters and can't come. I'm not supposed to leave my bed, you know." She paused. "It's probably true. Jan has heard that there's a Conclave of the Immortals of the South day after tomorrow." She glanced at Connor imploringly. "Can't you get me to him, Tom? Please—I must see him."

Connor smiled, amused, as a swift thought crossed his mind. Margaret of Urbs must indeed have been perturbed this morning. She had forgotten to reclaim her medallion. If he were to use it before she remembered—

"Perhaps I can help you reach him, Evanie," he whispered. "If you'll come at once."

CHAPTER XX

The Conspirators

THE guards passed them without question, with only a glance at the medallion.

When they reached the anteroom beyond the arch they at once saw the Master at his littered desk. Evanie dropped gracefully to one knee as they neared the ruler. But Connor stood erect and stared at Margaret of Urbs, who sat in a chair by the window, a book on her lap, a black cigarette in her fingers spiraling smoke as she stared back at him.

The Master's eyes flickered over them.

"May I ask how you two managed to arrive here?" he inquired mildly.

Connor tossed the medallion on the desk, and his lips twisted in wry amusement when he saw the quivering start that twitched the dainty lips of the Princess. She arose quickly and moved to the Master's side. She and Evanie gazed at each other across the desk. The eyes of Margaret of Urbs were faintly disdainful, but Evanie's were hostile.

It was Tom Connor's first opportunity to make a first-hand comparison of the two. He hated himself for

making it, but here it was thrust upon him.

The Princess was a trifle taller, a bit more slender than Evanie, and infinitely more beautiful, lovely as Evanie was. It wasn't fair, Connor told himself bitterly—terribly unfair, in fact, to compare Evanie's beauty with the unearthly beauty of the Black Flame of Urbs. It was like contrasting the simple loveliness of a wild rose to the splendor of an orchid, or a brown milkweed butterfly to a star-flying Luna moth.

The Master spoke.

"I presume you have a reason for coming."

"Yes," said Evanie. "I can't stand it—being imprisoned in a single room. I had to see you." Her lips quivered. She was a consummate actress, Connor suddenly realized. "You know I —I have—metamorphic blood in me. You know what that means. I *have* to move about in the open to breathe air that comes from the sky, not from Palace ventilators. So I've come to ask you for a little freedom. Just permission to walk now and then in the Inner Gardens."

Connors wondered how walking in the square of the Inner Gardens could encompass her escape, since the Palace surrounded it.

"It is my intention to release you, but not yet," the Master said. "Not until I have had what I wish from Thomas Connor."

"But I can't stand it!" the girl pleaded tremulously.

The Master turned to Connor.

"Remembering your oath," he said, "do you second this request? This is no move against me?"

"I do not break my word," Connor said.

"Well, I see no harm in it." The Master called a few syllables into the box beside him, then spoke to Evanie. "You have the liberty of the halls and the Inner Gardens—no more. As for you"—his eyes flickered over Connor —"apparently you manage without my permission. That's all."

Evanie dropped again to her knee, rose and moved toward the archway. As Connor followed, the Master called:

"Not you, Thomas Connor."

Connor turned again toward the faintly amused face of the ruler.

"I perceive," the Master said, "that my sister has disobeyed me."

The Princess laughed in that mocking way of hers.

"Do I ever obey you, Joaquin?"

"Nominally, at times." He paused, studying his sister coolly for a moment, then again turned his attention to the man before him. "As you may know," he remarked, "I have summoned a Conclave for day after tomorrow. I am completely occupied. But I do not forget your promise, Thomas Connor, nor have I lost interest in the stores of ancient knowledge. Therefore, you will accompany the Princess to the chambers behind the Throne Room and fulfill your promise by explaining to her as much as time permits of mathematics, particularly of the meaning of logarithms and of the device I have heard termed the slide-rule. She will understand you. That's all."

HE met the eyes of the Princess. "I may obey you this time, Joaquin," she said, and moved out of the door.

Connor followed her. The halls betrayed the activity of the coming Conclave, and were more crowded than he had observed before. Twice grave-faced, long-haired Immortals passed them, raising respectful hands in salute to Margaret of Urbs.

She turned into the South Corridor.

"This isn't the way," he objected.

"We're going to the Tower." She glanced sideward at him. "You'll see soon why the Palace needs all its size. There'll be twenty thousand Immortals here, and we have room for all of them—half the Immortals in the world."

"Half! Evanie said there were three million."

She gave him an inscrutable smile.

"It does no harm to let the Weeds over-estimate our strength."

"Then why tell me?"

Her smile was the unfathomable one of the Mona Lisa.

"I never do anything without reason," was her only reply.

He laughed. When once again they reached the aspiring pinnacle of the Tower, without a glance at the mighty city below the Princess pulled pen and paper from a table, seated herself, and faced Connor.

"Well?" she queried. "Begin."

He did. It was a new Margaret of Urbs he saw now, unkown before save possibly in that brief moment when he had mentioned the Venus of Milo, or when earlier in the woods she had shown him how vast was her knowledge of and interest in history and world events.

She was eager, curious, questioning, avid for knowledge, and uncannily quick to comprehend. There were queer gaps in her learning. Often he had to stop to explain terms utterly elementary, while at other times she followed him through the most complex maze of reasoning without a question.

The afternoon waned, dusk crept over the great vista, and at length she threw down her pen.

"Enough," she said. "We must have ten-place logarithm tables worked out. They'll be priceless at Earth-eye." Not until then did a trace of mockery creep in to her voice. "I suppose you realize," she taunted, "that once we have your knowledge all reason to keep you alive is gone, but the reasons to kill you remain."

He laughed.

"You'd like to frighten me, wouldn't you? Haven't you tried that often enough? The Master trusts my word. I trust his—but not yours." His lips twisted. "Had I not trusted him, I could have escaped this morning. What was to prevent me from taking your weapon away, dropping you on a deserted shore—or even kidnapping you—and escaping in the *Sky-rat?* I never promised not to escape. What kept me here was my trust in his word, and a desire to see this game played out!"

"There is no safety anywhere in the world for you, Thomas Connor," said the Flame softly, "except in my favor. And why you still live is a mystery, so much so that I wonder at it. I have never before been so indulgent to one I hate." She flashed her glorious emerald eyes to his face. "*Do* I hate you?"

"You should know hatred better than I."

"Yes—and yet I wonder." She smiled slowly. "If ever I love the way I hate, not death itself could thwart me. But there is no man strong enough to conquer me."

"Or perhaps," he retorted, "that one isn't interested."

SHE smiled again with almost a trace of wistfulness.

"You're very strong," she admitted. "I should have loved to have lived in your ancient days. To have lived among your great fighters and great makers of beauty. At least those were men—your ancients. I could have loved one of those."

"And haven't you," he asked ironically, "ever loved a man?"

He could detect no mocking note in her voice.

"Loved? I have thought myself in love a hundred times. At least a dozen times I have gone to Joaquin to beg immortality for some man I have loved. But Joaquin swore to Martin Sair long ago to grant it only to those worthy of it, and he has kept that oath."

She smiled wryly. "It takes all a man's youth to prove himself worthy, and so the Immortals are all dry scientists—not to *my* taste! Joaquin refused me each time I asked for the favor, wanting to know if I were sure I'd never tire of him for whom I begged—to swear I was sure. And of course I couldn't swear." She paused thoughtfully. "He was always right, too; every time. I did tire even before old age blighted them."

"And what did *you* do to prove yourself worthy?" Connor mocked.

"I'm serious today," the Princess said. "I'm not teasing now. I think I could love you, Thomas Connor."

"Thank you." He grinned, suspecting the glitter in the green eyes though he did not see it. "In my time it was the custom for the man to make

such declarations."

"Your time!" flared Margaret of Urbs. "What do I care for your antediluvian customs and prehistoric prejudices? Would you have the Black Flame as shrinking and modest as little Evanie pretends to be?"

"I'd dislike you less if you were."

"You don't dislike me. You're merely afraid of me because I represent everything you hate in a woman—and yet you can't hate me. Indeed, I rather think you love me."

He laughed, mocking now, himself.

"I'm Margaret of Urbs!" she flashed. "What do I want of you? Nothing! I don't really want you at all, Tom Connor. You'd be like all the others; you'd age. Those mighty limbs of yours will turn skinny, or else fat and bloated. Those clear eyes will be pale and watery. Your teeth will yellow and your hair fall out, and then you'll be gone!"

She pulled a cigarette from the box and blew a plume of smoke in his impassive face.

"Go brag of this when we release you—if we do! Go tell it up and down the world that you alone of all men were strong enough to reject the love of Margaret of Urbs. Go say that the Black Flame failed to scorch you—failed even to warm you." Her voice quivered. "And go say too that no other man save you ever learned—how unhappy—she is!"

The deep eyes were tear-bright. He stared into them perplexed. Was this merely more acting? Was there nothing left of Margaret of Urbs save a lovely masque and a thousand poses—no real being within? He forced a sardonic grin to his lips—forced it, for the impossible beauty of the girl tore at him despite his will.

AT his smile her face darkened. "And then say," she said, from between tight lips, "that the Black Flame doesn't care what talk you make of her, because she burns on, while you—and those you talk to—in so very few years will be dust! Dust!"

Again he laughed at her and the Flame turned suddenly away.

"I suppose you may go now," she said dully.

But Connor hardly heard her. He was caught in speculations concerning the strange black and golden soul of the Princess, baffling, hateful, fascinating to the point of deadliness, and yet — somehow wistful, almost pitiful. It was almost, he thought, as if in the glimpse he had caught of her in the freedom of the woods he had seen the true soul of the woman, and all the rest was masquerading.

He stared across at the glory of her face, now subdued to sadness as she gazed out at a million lighted windows. Then a flicker of motion caught his eye, far, far beneath him in the well of shadows in the Inner Gardens.

"Someone's in the Gardens," he observed absently.

"Oh," said the Princess listlessly, "it must be an Antarctic Immortal, enjoying a garden under the sky." She clicked the vision screen. "Garden," she ordered dully. "North bank of the pool."

A burst of choked laughter startled him. He swung about. There, shown on the screen before his eyes, was Evanie, seated on a garden bench, her head on the shoulder of Jan Orm, his arm about her waist!

"A waiter!" the Black Flame said scornfully. "A Palace waiter!"

But despite her laughter and his own confusion, Connor did not fail to notice that there were still tears in her eyes.

CHAPTER XXI

The Dinner at the Sleeper's

CONNOR awoke late next morning, and to an instant memory of the shock he had experienced at the sight of Evanie and Jan Orm. Most of the night he had spent in improvising possible excuses for the girl. Perhaps it was an innocent scene he had witnessed.

After all, she and Jan were lifelong friends, born and raised in Ormon and it might be that Evanie had turned to him in loneliness, even in pique at his,

Tom Connor's own involuntary attendance on Margaret of Urbs. But the mocking suggestions of the Princess, and the memory of Evanie's contented face in the vision screen—those troubled him. And he remembered, too, Jan's confession that he loved Evanie.

Dressing, he glimpsed her far below in the Inner Gardens, with her bronze hair glinting. She was lying at full length on the grass. He forgot breakfast and hurried into the corridor, where the guard, remembering the medallion of the Princess, merely saluted respectfully, unaware that Connor no longer possessed the disc of gold.

He descended at once to the ground level, followed an interminable passage toward the Palace's center, and flung open a door at its end. Instead of daylight, a dim-lit chamber with glowing walls lay beyond, wherein, after a moment of blinking, he descried a row of perhaps twenty men. Some stared at him, surprised, but most kept their eyes fixed steadily on the shining wall.

"I'm sorry," he said to the nearest man. "I was looking for the Gardens."

Unexpectedly, a voice spoke beside him.

"The Gardens are two stories above us, Thomas. And I see you still wander."

It was the tall, ebony-haired Master. Beside him was another Immortal, grave-eyed and sandy-haired.

"This is Thomas Connor," said the Master, "our storehouse of ancient knowledge. Thomas, this is Martin Sair, here from Austropolis." He added, "Thomas is one of those who affect not to kneel in our presence. I indulge him."

"Indulgence is a habit of yours, Urbanus," rumbled the sandy-haired man. "Does the Princess also—indulge?"

"Not willingly. Margaret is having one of her restless years, I'm afraid." He frowned. "But they pass—they pass. Look there, Thomas." He gestured toward the wall. "This is our seeing room. Here is focused every scanner in Urbs—in any of my cities, if I wish. If the Palace is the world's brain, this room is the visual center."

Connor took his eyes from a fascinated scrutiny of the legendary Martin Sair, the Giver of Life, and glanced at the walls. Millions of tiny pictures covered them, each small as a thumbnail, glowing some in colors, and some, when the distant origin was in darkness, in the dull blue-gray of the short waves. He saw flickers of movement as the pictured men and women went about their daily business.

"We can enlarge any scene there," said the Master, pointing at a row of wider screens, some even now illumined. "In this room I can follow a man's life from birth to death, so long as he remains in one of my cities." He paused musingly, then shrugged. "The Gardens are two floors above us, Thomas."

IT was dismissal. Connor cast a last glance at Martin Sair, feeling as if he were gazing on a demigod. Martin Sair, the Giver of Life, greatest except the Master among all the heroic figures in the dazzling age of the Enlightenment. Then he backed away from the great Immortal and betook himself to the Gardens.

Evanie was there, lovely as a bit of the ancient statuary that dotted the square, as she lay in the barbaric costume of Urbs watching a twenty-inch column of water slip smoothly from the mouth of a giant stone lion. She gave Connor a cool glance as he approached.

"Evanie!" he said unhappily. "I've looked everywhere for you."

"Why?" she asked indifferently.

"To be with you, of course. You know that."

"I don't know it. Or has the Flame burned you at last?"

Her coolness baffled him.

"Evanie," he pleaded, "why are you so offended?"

Her mouth hardened. You've deserted the Weeds, Tom. Do you think I could ever forgive that?"

"See here, Evanie," he said hastily. "There's one thing you seem to have forgotten. I was thrust in among the Weeds of Ormon without choice. Does that mean I have to accept your social theories blindly? Perhaps I'm

too primitive for anarchy—but I think you are too!" He went on defiantly. "I don't think your theories will work, and I do think the Master's government is what this world needs. It isn't perfect, but it's better than the Weeds offer—and even for you, Evanie, I won't give up freedom of thought."

"You mean you won't think!" she blazed. "You're not fooling me, Tom! I know the way the Black Flame poisons men, and you've been with her too often! You've been burned and—" Her anger mounted. "Oh, go away!"

"Evanie," he began earnestly, and paused. *Was* he untouched by the devastating charm of the Princess? The dizzying warmth of her lips, his reeling brain in the hour on the Pacific— "She's the daughter of Hell!" he muttered.

"Go away!" flared Evanie. "Quitter!"

Hot words rose to his lips. But he suppressed his anger, even as the picture he had seen of Jan and Evanie flashed on his mental screen, and turned away into the Palace.

For an hour he stamped through the endless halls now crowded with arriving Immortals from Africa, Antarctica, Australia, and South America. Now and again one turned cool eyes on his forbidding countenance or smiled gravely after him. None stopped or addressed him.

He must have completed the somewhat less than a mile of circuit several times when a guard approached him. He turned a furious scowl on the fellow, but he had only a tiny black envelope inscribed in white in the precise script of the Princess. Connor ripped the missive open. A short note was inside. It read:

> Come to my chambers at half after the seventh hour to escort me to dinner. Wear the black costume in your quarters, and the black cape.
>
> MARGARET OF URBS.

Merely an invitation—but a royal invitation is a command. He laughed bitterly. Why not? The Black Flame could burn no more painfully than she had already, and at least he could vent his anger on her.

ALTHOUGH hours remained before the appointed dinner hour, he went back to his quarters, glancing indifferently at the Urban formal dress laid carefully on his bed. It was exactly like his present garb save that it shimmered black with metallic scales, and was edged with silver. Crossing to the window he sat staring down at Evanie in the Gardens, bathing her rounded limbs in sunlight, until a man in Urban dress who could only be Jan Orm joined her. He turned angrily away then, fuming.

With no breakfast or lunch, he was both short-tempered and ravenous. So when the hours had dragged by, and he finally located the Chambers on the hundred and seventh level of the South Tower, he was in no pleasant mood. Two armed guards stepped aside, and the serving woman, Sora, admitted him with a clumsy curtsy.

He passed into the anteroom, furnished, as was the Black Flame's laboratory behind the Throne Room and her place at the summit of the Tower, lavishly and ornately. But surprise leaped to his eyes as he saw the gigantic black Persian cat that gazed steadily at him, with green eyes that seemed almost a replica of those of the Princess.

"A cat!" he exclaimed. "I thought they were extinct."

"Satan is immortal," said the soft voice of Margaret of Urbs.

He whirled and faced her as she emerged from the inner chamber, and hunger and anger alike drained out of him as he stared.

She was magnificent! Garbed in a jet-black cape that dropped to her green-crystaled sandals, she seemed taller as she advanced into the room. A circlet of green gems—emeralds, he thought—bound her ebony hair, and beneath it her eyes were smoldering sea-green fire.

But he felt the thrill of surprised shock as she threw open the cape. Her brief kirtle and corselet glittered in a solid surface of green gems, and at her waist sparkled that mystic crystalline flower of many colors, glistening from

red to violet, blue, and purest emerald. Then she moved toward the lamp, and in its yellow radiance her whole costume was green no longer, but the deep lavender of wine.

"Alexandrites," she laughed, answering his unspoken question. "Green by day, lavender by artificial light. Synthetic, of course. There aren't this many natural stones in the world." She turned. "Like it?"

"Exquisite!" he whispered. "You daughter of Lucifer!"

He followed her in rebellious fascination as they progressed unattended to the ground floor and into a long Palace car with stiff-backed driver and footman.

"Merimee's," she said, and the car spun silently away, mounting to the upper tier of Palace Avenue.

It was dusk, but now and then, when traffic slowed their motion, cheers sounded, and many a glance was cast at them. Margaret of Urbs ignored the glances, but smiled at the cheers.

"Who's Merimee?" Connor asked.

"A rich Sleeper in Kaatskill. Society here is largely Sleepers."

"No nobility?"

"The Immortals seldom entertain. We're a serious lot."

Kaatskill appeared, and they glided into the grounds of an imposing Grecian mansion. Lights were glowing, gay voices sounded as they entered.

There was a sudden silence as the whole assemblage knelt. Margaret of Urbs gestured and the guests arose. Merimee himself, paunchy, bald, came babbling his appreciation, his gratitude for the honor to his house.

"But the entertainment, Your Highness! On such short notice, you see —best the bureau could furnish—I know you'll forgive—"

CHAPTER XXII

Declaration

THE dinner was lavish. Connor sat at the left of the Princess. Lines of servitors passed in a steady stream, bearing soups, then fish—Bombay ducks, pompano, a dozen unknown viands—and fowl—ortolan, ptarmigan, pheasant, and nameless others.

Connor was ravenous. He sampled everything, and it was the middle of the meal before he noticed the aghast looks of the crowd, and that he was almost the only one who was eating.

"Have I violated the proprieties?" he asked the Princess.

"You're supposed to eat only of the dishes I taste," she informed coolly.

"But I'm hungry. And you've eaten practically nothing."

It was true. Margaret of Urbs had taken only a little salad, though she had sipped glass after glass of wine.

"I like to tantalize these hogs," she replied in low but audible tones. "This bores me."

"Then why come?"

"A whim."

He chuckled, turning his attention to the entertainment. This, he thought, was excellent. An incredibly skilful juggler succeeded a talented magician; a low-voiced woman sang sweet and ancient tunes; a trio played tinkling melodies. A graceful pair of adagio dancers performed breathtakingly in the square surrounded by the tables, and a contortionist managed unbelievable bodily tangles. The performers came and went in silence. Not one burst of applause rewarded them.

"Unappreciative audience!" Connor growled.

"Is it?" the Princess drawled. "Watch."

The following number, he thought, was the worst of the lot. A frightened, dingy man with a half-trained dancing monkey that chattered and grimaced, but made a sad failure of the dancing. Yet at the conclusion Margaret of Urbs raised her dainty hands and applauded.

Instantly bedlam broke loose. Applause crashed through the hall; encores were shouted, and the astonished player stumbled once more through the ludicrous performance.

"Well, his fortune's made," observed the Princess. "N'York will want him, and Chicago and Singapore

as well."

The master of ceremonies was presenting "Homero, the Poet of Personalities," a thin-faced Urban crowned with laurel leaves and bearing a classical harp.

He bowed and smiled.

"And who, Ladies and Lords, shall it be? Of whom do I sing?"

"Her Highness!" roared the crowd. "The Princess of Urbs!"

Homero strummed his harp, and began chanting minstrel-like:

The Princess? Adjective and verb
Turn feeble! Glorious? Superb?
Exquisite? None of these can name
The splendor of the Urban Flame.

Our Princess! Stars are loath to rise
Lest they be faded by her eyes,
Yet once they've risen, they will not set,
But gaze entranced on Margaret.

The continents and oceans seven
Revolve beneath the laws of Heaven;
What limit, law, or cannon curbs
The tongue that speaks the Flame of Urbs?

APPLAUSE, violent and enthusiatic, greeted the doggerel. Margaret of Urbs lowered her eyes and smiled.

"Who now?" Homero called. "Of whom do I sing?"

Unexpectedly, Merimee spoke. "Tom Connor!" he cried. "Tom Connor, the Ancient!"

Homero strummed his harp and sang:

Ladies and Lords, you do me honor,
Giving the name of Thomas Connor,
That Ancient, phoenixlike arisen
Out of his cold, sepulchral prison,
Thrust into life—a comet hurled
From the dead past into the world.

What poet great enough to sing
The wonderful awakening?
Let golden Science try explain
That miracle—and try in vain;
For only Art, by Heaven inflamed,
Can dream how Death itself was tamed!"

"He'll turn this into some insipid compliment to me," whispered Margaret of Urbs. The Poet of Personalities sang on.

Year after year the strong flesh mouldered,
Dim was the spark of life that smouldered—
Until the Princess glanced that way,
And lo! The cold and lifeless clay,
To Death and Time no longer slave,
Burst out triumphant from the grave!

In the roar of applause Connor sat amazed at the reference to his own experience. How did Homero know? He turned to question the Princess.

"I'm tired of this," she said, and rose to depart.

The whole body of guests rose with her. She drew her cape around her and strode to the car.

"Slowly," she ordered the driver, then leaned back gazing at Connor. "Well?" she murmured.

"Interesting. That Homero—he's clever."

"Bah! Stock verses composed beforehand."

"But—about me?"

"Don't you know you've been a newspaper and vision sensation?"

"The devil!" Connor was shocked.

"This Homero," she went on musingly. "Once, long ago, I knew Sovern, the only great poet of the Enlightenment, he who half seriously, half contemptuously, named me the Black Flame, and the only man—save you, Tom Connor, who ever flaunted me to my face. And one evening he angered me, and I exiled him from Urbs, Urbs that he loved—and too late I found that his bitterness grew out of a love for me.

"So I called him back in time to die, when not even Martin Sair could save him. And dying he said to me—I recall it—I take my revenge in remembering that you are human, and to be human is to love and suffer. Do not forget it." She paused. "Nor have I."

"And was it true?" asked Connor, struck suddenly by this revelation of the fiery, imperious, untameable character beside him.

"I think, lately, that it *is* true," she murmured, and drew a long breath. "I have slain, I have tortured, for less violence than you have committed against me."

She flung open her cape, baring the marks of his fingers still on the exquisite curve of her throat.

"I cannot—suffer the touch of violence, and yet you have struck me twice and still live. There is a magic about you, Thomas Connor, some laughing ancient strength that has died out of the world. I have never feared anything in my life, I have never begged anyone—but I fear you and I plead with you." She swayed against him. "Kiss me!" she whispered.

HE stared down at the unearthly beauty of her face, but there was a green light in her eyes that puzzled him. Coolly he fought the fascination that was cast netlike about him. This was but another taste of the torment she had promised. He was sure of it.

"I will not," he said. "Each time I have kissed you, you have laughed at me."

"But I will not laugh now."

"You'll not trap me again by the same trick," he said. "Find another way for the torment you threatened. And when you're ready to kill me for the violence I did you, I'll die laughing at *you*."

"I have forgiven that," she said softly.

"Then," he said mockingly. "Here's more to forgive."

He lifted her slender wrist in his mighty hand, circled it with his powerful fingers, and crushed it in a grasp like contracting steel. It gave him a grim pleasure to thus vent his turbulent emotions on her, and to see her face whiten under pain that must have been excruciating. But save for her pallor she gave no sign of agony.

He dropped her hand, ashamed of his cruelty, though it was not as if he had used his strength against a mortal woman. Margaret of Urbs seemed to him more of a female demon.

But she only said softly, "I thank you for this. It has taught me what I wanted to know, for any other than you would now be dead for it. I love you, Tom."

"Flame!" he retorted, while her eyes widened the merest trifle at the familiarity. "I don't believe you."

"But you must! After all these years upon years I am sure. I swear it, Tom! Say you love me."

"I love—Evanie." But despite his words the doubts that had been constantly creeping in on him assailed him. Evanie was still alien somehow.

"You love *me!*" she murmured. "I am the Black Flame, yet I plead now. Say it, Tom!"

"I love Evanie!"

"Then will you kiss me?"

He stared down at her. "Why not?" he said savagely. "Do you think I'm afraid of you?"

He spun her against him and her lips burned against his.

"Say you love me!" she repeated in a tense whisper. "Say it!"

"I love—" he began, and the car slid to a stop before the Palace arch. The footman stood holding the car door open.

Margaret of Urbs gazed as if distraught from Connor's face to the silent attendant and back again. Abruptly she thrust herself away, her mouth quivering.

"I wish," she said tensely, "I—wish I had never seen you!"

She struck him a sharp blow across his mouth, clambered unassisted to the ground, and disappeared into the Palace, trailing her black cape behind her.

Back in his room again, Connor was in a turmoil, ashamed, perplexed, bitter.

"Caught!" he swore fiercely. "Burned! God! What a fool—what a weakling!"

For call it what he would—it was true. Fascination, infatuation, anything—The fact faced him that the Black Flame had burned Evanie from his heart. He swore viciously and battered at Evanie's door.

THE blows echoed into silence. There was no response.

With a long-drawn sigh, Connor turned away from Evanie's door. Whether absent or simply ignoring him, she had failed him, and he needed her desperately now. He wanted to

quench the fires of the Black Flame in her cool simplicity, to reassure himself that what he now felt was an obsession, an infatuation—anything but love.

He wanted to convince himself it was Evanie he loved by telling her so. Better never to have emerged from under the prison than to live again, loving a mask of beauty hiding a daughter of Satan.

He strode to the casement overlooking the Gardens. Dim light from the Palace windows streaked in bars across it, but he saw no sign of Evanie. But could that be Evanie—there where the bushes shadowed the pool?

CHAPTER XXIII

The Amphimorphs in the Pool

TOM CONNOR made his way hurriedly to the Gardens. He saw Evanie crouched in the shadow of shrubbery just above the brink of the water. He dashed forward as she glanced up at him.

"Evanie!" he began. "Oh, my dear—"

"Hush!" Her voice was tense.

"But—"

"Be still. Speak softly. Do you think I want a scanner on me?" She paused "I'd rather you'd go away," she whispered.

He seated himself stubbornly beside her, though it seemed certain she was waiting for someone. Jan Orm, probably.

"I won't go," he said in subdued voice. "You've got to listen to me, Evanie."

"Please!" she murmured. "Be quiet. Tom, I've been waiting here six hours."

"For what?"

She made no reply. He subsided into gloomy silence, watching the great column of water that gushed from the jaws of the huge stone lion at the far end of the pool. The water, smooth as a steel pillar, fell with surprisingly little sound.

But while he gazed, it changed. The smoothness was broken. Bubbles flashed, and then the flow ceased altogether while a huge bubble glistened, billowed and broke. Something white and shining and large as a man shot with a small splash into the pool. The column of water crashed instantly back.

A webbed hand holding a silk-wrapped package rose suddenly from the black water. An amphimorph!

Evanie seized the bundle, crammed it beneath an Urban cape at her side.

"Quick!" she said tensely. "Stand here beside me, Tom, so we'll block the scanner."

He obeyed wonderingly. A queer low coo came from Evanie's lips. The black waters parted again and he glimpsed the tiny round mouth and horrible face of the creature in the pool. It flopped to the bank, scuttled desperately along into the bushes. He saw it raise the lid of a manhole or a storm-sewer, and it was gone.

Pale and trembling Evanie sank down on the bank, her bronzed legs dangling toward the water.

"If only we weren't seen!" she whispered.

"How the devil did that thing get here?" Connor demanded.

"It rode a bubble down the water tunnel from the mountains, fifty miles. An amphimorph doesn't need much air. A big bubble will last."

"But—"

"Don't ask me how it found the maze of mains in Urbs. I don't know. I only know they have queer instinctive ways of getting where they want to go. Now it's gone into the storm-sewer. It will find its way to the Canal and so up rivers to its mountains."

"But what was that it brought, and from whom?"

"From King Orm."

"From whom?" he persisted.

"Tom," she said quietly, "I'm not going to tell you."

"What was in that package, Evanie?"

"I won't tell you that, either." She threw the cape over her arm, concealing the package. "I can't trust you, Tom. You and I are enemies."

SHE backed away at his anger.

"Tom, please! You promised to help me escape, didn't you?"

"All right," he yielded dully. "Evanie, I sought you out here because I wanted to end this misunderstanding. Please give me a chance to convince you I love you!"

He held out his arms to her. She backed another step.

"I won't come near you, Tom. I won't trust myself in your arms. I'm afraid of you, and I'm afraid of myself. You're strong—too strong for me physically, and perhaps too strong otherwise. You wakened my love once. I dare not chance it again."

"Oh, Evanie! Now of all times, when I need you!"

"Need me?" A queer expression flickered over her face. "So the Black Flame burns at last!" He voice dropped to a murmur. "I'm sorry for you, Tom. I'm sorry for anyone who loves her, because she's utterly heartless. But I can't come near you. I don't dare!"

She turned and darted suddenly into the Palace, leaving him to stare hopelessly after, and then to follow slowly.

He slept little that night. Restless, tortured hours were filled with dreams of Margaret of Urbs and the sound of her laughter. He arose early and wandered dully from his room.

The halls were crowded with arriving Immortals, among whom he stalked as silent and grave as themselves. At last, tired of aimless wandering, he went into the shaded Gardens, and sat glumly down beside the pool.

Far overhead Triangle drifted with muffled, throbbing roars, and a bird sang in the bushes. Deep in his own perturbed thoughts, he was startled when he heard his name spoken softly, almost timidly.

"Tom."

He looked up. Margaret of Urbs stood beside him, garbed in the most magnificent gown he had ever seen, golden and black, and concealing her tiny feet. Instead of the circlet of the previous evening, she wore now a coronet of scintillant brilliance, and the strange flower flamed at her waist.

"Official robes," she said and smiled. "I preside this morning."

She looked a little worn, he thought. There was a pallor on her cheeks, and a subdued air about her. Her smile, almost wistful, tore at him.

"You didn't give me a chance to thank you for last night," he said.

"Did you want to thank me? For—everything?"

"No," he said stonily. "Not for everything?"

She dropped listlessly to the bench beside him.

"I'm tired," she said wearily. "I didn't sleep well, and my head aches. That Grecian wine. I must see Martin Sair."

"My head aches for other reasons," he said grimly.

"I'm sorry, Tom."

"Were you laughing at me last night?" he blazed.

"No," she said gently. "No."

"I don't believe you!"

"No matter. Tom, I came here to tell you something." She paused and gazed steadily at him. "The Master will grant you immortality."

"What?"

SHE nodded. "He considers you worthy."

"Worthy! What of the children of mine he was so anxious about?"

"You're to have them first."

He laughed bitterly. "Then I'll be old and feeble by the time I'm ready for immortality. Evanie has refused me—and I refuse him! I'll live my life out in my own way."

"Think well of it first," she said slowly, and something in her voice caught him.

"Now I know I won't accept," he flashed. "You begged him for it! Do you think I'd take favors of you?"

"I didn't—" She was silent. After a moment she said, "Would you believe one statement of mine, Tom?"

"Not one."

At last his bitterness touched her. She flushed faintly. The old gleam of mockery shone for an instant.

"You're right, of course," she snapped. "There's nothing real remaining of Margaret of Urbs. She's

the Black Flame that burns on illusion's altar. You must never believe a single word of hers."

"Nor do I!"

"But will you believe one sentence if I swear it by something sacred to me? One thing, Tom?"

"What's sacred to you? God? Honor? Not even yourself!"

"By the one thing I love," she said steadily, "I swear I'm speaking the truth now. Will you believe me?"

It was on his very tongue to say no. He was thoroughly surprised to hear himself mutter "Yes"—and mean it.

"Then do you remember that day in the Triangle when I said I was going to commit suicide? I swear that is the only lie I've ever told you. Do you understand? The only lie!"

She arose as he stared at her uncomprehendingly.

"I want to be alone," she whispered. "I'm going to" — a brief, wistful smile— "my thinking room."

CONNOR'S brain was whirling. He did believe her. What of it? Evanie didn't love him. He knew that now. And he didn't love Evanie. And Margaret of Urbs—said she loved him! Could it be possible . . .

A blinding light in his brain! The Black Flame—his! The unearthly beauty of her, the wild, untamed character, his to tame—if he could. The santanic spirit, the fiery soul, all his for life. For life? For immortality, if he chose!

An exultant shout burst from him and went echoing between the walls as he leaped to the Palace door, flung himself through.

Memory of Evanie had vanished like mist. Where was the Princess? In her thinking room? Then he remembered. The laboratory behind the Throne Room.

A SPEAKER blared down the hall as he ran: "Conclave in thirty minutes."

The corridors were thronged; he jostled his way past crowds of guards, servants, officials, and austere Immortals. Curious eyes followed him, but no one moved to halt him.

Not, at least, until he reached the great arch of the Throne Room itself. The crystal doors were shut and a line of four impassive guards blocked the way. He moved to step between them, and a sharp challenge sounded.

He paused. "I want to see the Princess," he said firmly.

"None to pass," snapped the guard. "Master's orders."

"But is the Princess in there?"

"Her Highness," responded the guard, "entered here five minute ago. She said nothing of any one to follow."

CHAPTER XXIV

The Atomic Bomb

RELUCTANTLY, Tom Connor fell back. This was the only way to her laboratory; of that he was certain. He leaned against the wall and clenched his fists in a frenzy of impatience.

The glass doors opened and the Master emerged, accompanied by Martin Sair and two other tall Immortals.

"Sir," Connor begged eagerly, "tell this fellow to pass me. I want to see the Princess."

A curious, quizzical expression flickered in the eyes of the great ruler. He shook his head.

"I'm sorry, Thomas," he said mildly. "In fifteen minutes the Princess will be needed. You can wait."

"But—I think she wants to see me!"

"Then she can wait as well." His eyes flickered again. "She has waited, not too patiently, for more than seven centuries." He moved away down the corridor, leaving Connor nonplussed.

He curbed his impatience. After all, the Master was right. Time stretched before him and Margaret of Urbs—years upon years of it. But it was hard to lose these precious moments.

He thought of the vision screens. Just behind him was the vast office opposite the Throne Room. He turned in there, bursting in upon a scene of feverish activity as the records of half the world were made ready for the Im-

mortals of the Southern Hemisphere. Glancing about, he descried a screen on a table at the far end of the room, and twisted his way down the line of desks, ignoring a thousand staring clerks.

"The Princess," he said eagerly, snapping the switch. "In her laboratory behind the Throne Room."

On the screen flashed a girl's face, but not that of Margaret of Urbs.

"I'm sorry," she said. "No calls to any at the Conclave. Master's orders." The screen clicked blank again as he growled an angry epithet.

In the hallway he saw Evanie, staring with strange intentness at the closed glass doors. He pushed his way to her side.

"Hello," he said, and was puzzled by her sudden look of fear. But she recovered herself and glanced coolly at him.

"Oh, it's you," she said briefly.

He thought wonderingly how different was this Evanie from the timid, modest little Ormon girl of so few days ago. But he hardly cared. The Flame had burned him free of Evanie.

"Waiting for the parade of the Immortals?" he asked with a quiet smile.

"Perhaps."

"I thought you hated them so that you'd prefer not even looking at them."

Her voice changed to bitterness. "I do."

"Well, what's the answer, then?"

She glanced at a watch on her wrist.

"You'll know in a moment or two." She gave him a curiously sardonic smile. "I'm not afraid to tell you now. I'll even tell you what was in the package I took from the amphimorph. Would you like to know?"

"Of course."

Her voice quivered excitedly. "In that package was an atomic bomb!"

"An atomic bomb?"

"Yes. And do you know where it is now?" The voice rose exultant, fanatically elated. "At the wall behind the Throne of Urbs! Behind the throne where the Master's sitting this moment!" She laughed at his horrified face. "My thanks for sponsoring my request for freedom, Tom. It helped."

"The Master isn't in there," he said tightly. "I saw him leave."

He saw her face whiten—and then an appalling thought struck him.

"Oh, God! But the Princess is! The Princess is!"

HE dashed toward the guarded door, disregarding Evanie's cry of warning: "Tom, it's due! It's due!"

He rushed at the impassive guards, but before their challenge was uttered a thunderous roar reverberated in the vast hall like the rumbling thunder of a collapsing mountain.

A continuous screaming bellow like the clamor in hell rose in an ear-blasting crescendo, and beyond the glass doors rolled billowing clouds of steam, shot through with jagged fires.

Maddened to desperation, Tom Connor plunged against the doors. They swung inward and closed behind him, and he was in the room of the blast. Far down, behind the Master's throne, an erupting geyser of destruction appalled him—a mighty, roaring, billowing cloud of smoke-streaked steam that shrieked louder than the tortured souls of the seventh circle of hell.

Crashing discharges of stray energy etched flames through the cloud, like lightning behind a thunder-head, and the reverberations echoed above the roar of the disrupting hydrogen. The Master's throne was hidden by the bellowing fires that grounded to it.

But even that holcaust had not yet filled the vast concave of the Throne Room. The end where Connor stood, momentarily bewildered, was as yet clouded only by shreds and streamers. He lowered his head, and charged into the inferno. Margaret was caught somewhere behind that hellish blast!

Scalding steam licked at him, swirling about his body. His bare legs and shoulders stung at the touch, his face burned, but he gained the line of thrones and paused a single moment on the shielded side. What an engine of destruction! A bomb that, instead of venting its force in a single blast, kept on exploding as succesive

billions of atoms shattered.

No need to look for the door. The detonation, the first blast, had blown the wall open. Instantly he made a dash over the scorching debris, where the mighty girders were fantastically twisted and bent away from the roaring center, pointed up in the misty light. He launched himself at the edge of the opening, passing close to the very threshold of that trap-door of Tophet.

Gamma radiations excoriated his body. The shriek of dying atoms thundered against his tortured eardrums, and he was burning—blistering. But an implacable thrust urged him on. He was responsible for this chaos, this holocaust, and Margaret of Urbs—He had violated his oath to the Master! Evanie had betrayed him into that! She had tricked him into sponsoring her plea for freedom, and because he had aided her this had happened! Jan Orm could have done no damage alone. Only Evanie, because of the inhuman blood in her, could have dealt with an amphimorph. Evanie, with whom he had thought himself in love!

And the Princess, whom he did love, was somewhere beyond. He raged on, his mind turbulent as the blast itself, into Martin Sair's laboratory, a flaming outer region of hell clouded to invisibility. Suffocating, scorching, he crashed against its farther wall, slid along it, at last found the door.

THE luxurious room of the Princess was in chaotic disorder, but only lazy wisps of steam drifted there, and the bellow of the blast was muffled. But even now the wall was cracking.

"Margaret!" he cried." "Margaret of Urbs!"

Her voice answered him. She was in a corner, crouching. Injured? No, she was searching earnestly through a pile of debris that had been swept across the room by the first concussion. He rushed toward her.

"Come on!" he shouted. "We'll break a window and get out."

She glanced coolly up.

"A window? Try it. A bullet might, but nothing less."

He snatched up a chair, spun it fiercely against the pane. The chair shattered; two tiny dents showed in the crystal, and that was all. And in the Palace, ventilated by washed air from the topmost pinnacles of the Twin Towers, no windows opened. He whirled on her.

"Then it will have to be back through the blast!" he roared. "Come on!"

She stood up, facing him. She had slipped off the gold-black robe in the steaming heat, wore now the typical revealing garb of Urbs save that the material was of black velvet instead of metallic scales.

"You can't go through in clothes like that!" he shouted.

"My Venus," she said. "It was blown somewhere here. I want it."

"You'll come now!"

"I want my ivory Venus."

The pale flash of ivory caught his eye.

"Here it is, then," he snapped, thrusting the statuette into his belt. "Now come."

Faint mockery flashed in her eyes.

"What if I don't?"

He shook a rugged fist. "You will or I'll take you."

She was motionless.

"Why," she asked, "do you risk your life to reach me?"

"Because," he snarled in exasperation, "I was unwittingly responsible for this. I was tricked into breaking my word. Do you think I can let the Master—or you—suffer for my stupidity?"

"Oh," she said, her eyes dropping. "Well—I won't go."

"By God, you will!" He sprang to seize her but she evaded him.

But only for a moment, as again he saw the gleam of mockery in her eyes.

"Very well," she said, suddenly submissive.

He snatched the flowing robe from the floor as she turned and walked steadily toward the wall that now heaved and cracked and groaned. Before he could reach her she had flung open the door—and hell roared in upon them.

Martin Sair's laboratory was a mass of smoke and steam like the crater of Erebus that flames in the eternal ice of Antarctica. Flinging the robe over the Princess like an enshrouding blanket, Connor propelled her, muffled and stumbling, toward the evil effulgence of the screaming blast.

At the break in the wall he put his weight into a mighty thrust that sent her sliding, staggering, sprawling into the room where the fiery cloud closed, billowing, about her. Then he leaped through, his flesh writhing in the torment of the stinging rays, and blistering at the touch of scalding steam.

MARGARET of Urbs was clambering to her feet, stumbling in the entangling robe, in the all but unbearable shelter of the thrones. She choked as the searing air reached her lungs.

"You hurt!" she cried.

"Come on!"

Again the taunting gleam, even with blistering death staring them in the face. But she followed unresisting as he seized her arm and plunged through the blinding fog of steam and smoke that now filled the mighty room to the distant ceiling. Blind chance was their guide as they rushed ahead, staggering, coughing, teary-eyed. It seemed a long way. Were they circling in the gloom of the monstrous chamber?

The Princess dragged against Connor's arm.

"No," she gasped. "This way—this way."

He let her lead. They struggled through billowing masses that began to take fantastic shapes—charging monsters; heaving mountains. She staggered, stumbled, but shook off the arm he raised to support her.

"I've never needed help," she muttered proudly. "I never will."

It seemed to him that the blast roared closer.

"Are we—right?" he choked.

Then, through a momentary rift he saw something that sickened him—the row of thrones, smoking and blackened in the blaze. They had circled!

Through some vagary of draught or ventilation there was a little area of almost clear air beside the throne of the Princess. Coughing and choking, they faced each other in it. He was astounded to see a flickering, taunting smile play for a single instant on her lips. Her hair singed and plastered flat by the steamy condensation, her face soot-streaked and reddened, she was yet so incredibly lovely that he forgot even their peril as her smile turned suddenly earnest, wistful.

"Dearest," she whispered, inaudibly, but he read her lips. "I'll confess now. We were safe in my room. We must have been watched in the vision screens, and men would have come to cut through the window."

He was appalled.

"Then why—"

"Listen to me, Tom. Even here I misled you, for I knew which way the door lies by the pattern on the floor. But if you will not love me, I must kill you as I promised, then let both of us die! For I cannot watch you age year by year—and then perish. I cannot!"

"Flame!" he roared, his voice impassioned. "But I love you! Did you think— I love you, Flame!"

Her streaming eyes widened.

"Oh, God!" she choked. "Now it's too late!" She covered her face, then abruptly glanced up again, with a dawning hope in her eyes. "Perhaps not!" she cried. "Can they see us here? No—the steam. But men will come in moon-suits to carry away the blast—if—we can live—until then." She coughed. "But we can't. She was swaying. "You go—that way. Kiss me Tom, and leave me. I want to die —on the throne—of Urbs. Only—a thing—like this, some accident—can kill an—Immortal!"

"Leave you?" he cried. "Not even in death!" He choked as he drew her close.

A wave of steam and fire engulfed them. "Help me to my—throne," she whispered, gasping.

Her eyes, tear-bright and sea-green in the fierce lightnings, went blank. They closed, and she slipped half through his arms. Her knees gave way as she collapsed.

CHAPTER XXV

Inferno

HE held her against him. Put her on the throne? Why not? Why not hold her there until the end, die with her in his arms? Or perhaps shield her with his body until men came, or until the blast burned out. Somehow she must be saved!

Never—not even when a thousand years ago an electric current was shot through him to kill him, had his urge for life been so great as it was now. Now, when life promised so much—the love of himself and the Black Flame of Urbs, two beings who should have been dead centuries ago and in different ages—he must die!

Had Destiny kept them alive to meet and love for this brief moment before death? Madness! Better to die struggling for life. Raising the girl in his arms, he staggered away toward the wall that still shielded the room where he had found the Princess.

Her weight was slight, but he had not taken ten steps when he went crashing to his knees. He struggled up dizzily. The line of diagonal black squares showed dim on the floor, yet he could not be sure that he had not changed his direction. He was suffocating; the roaring blast seemed to bellow in a gigantic throbbing, now in his very ears, now dim and faint and far away.

He battled on. Suddenly he realized that he was moving burdenless. Without even being aware of it he had dropped the Princess. He turned grimly back until he stumbled over her lying huddled with her cheek against the steaming floor. Swinging her across his shoulder, gripping her knees so tightly that his fingers bit into the silk-soft skin, he staggered back over the lost ground.

Each step was a gamble with death. If he fell now he would never rise again. He tottered on while his lungs labored in the vitiated air and the searing steam. Then behind him the blast roared fainter. Or was it simply that his senses were dulling?

It was the sharp blow of his head against the wall that brought him back from a dreamy somnolence into which he was falling, surprised to feel the weight of the unconscious girl still on his shoulder.

The wall! Which wall? In what direction was the door that meant life? He groaned and turned at random to the right, simply because his right arm clutched the limbs of Margaret of Urbs and his left hand was free to support him against the carved masonry. But an ejaculation of triumph escaped his burned, cracked lips as his hand slid over steam-clouded glass, and he saw white faces through the track it left.

He could go no further; make not one more move. The limp body of the Princess slid from his arms, and vaguely then he knew that both of them were being dragged into the safety of the corridor. He gasped in great breaths of clear air that whistled in his seared throat, and then his heart chilled as his bloodshot eyes turned on the form of the Flame.

HER face frightened him. Waxen pale, still as the image on her throne, she seemed scarcely to breathe. A grave Immortal who bent above her straightened up and said tensely:

"Get Martin Sair—and quickly!" His eyes flashed to Connor. "You're not hurt," he said. "Just rest here for some time."

There was a stir in the hallway. Two men in brown all-encompassing suits and crystal helmets were pulling something metal. It looked like a steam-shovel scoop with two fifty-foot handles. A grapple for the blast, to box it before it undermined the vast Palace.

Then Martin Sair was at hand, and the Master, his sorrowful eyes on the Princess.

"Clear the corridor," said the sandy-haired Immortal, and guards swept back the crowd.

Through the North Arch, Connor glimpsed thousands upon thousands

of Urbans on the Palace lawn, and then they were hidden as the gates closed.

"He must go, too," said Martin Sair, nodding at Connor. "The fewer lungs here the better. The girl is asphyxiated."

"No!" Connor croaked, flinging an arm across the Flame.

"All right. Move aside, then."

But a roaring like all the tortured souls since creation burst from the opening doors. Out rushed the gnomelike men pulling their grapple, and Connor thrust his body between them and the Princess, taking the fierce rays on his own flesh.

The container glowed brilliant as the sun, and out beyond the North Arch a chain dropped from the sky—a Triangle to bear away the deadly thing, to drop it into the sea. And the Palace was silent now as the silence of death.

Death? Tom Connor glanced fearfully at the marble features of Margaret of Urbs. They were like death, too, and he gazed so fascinated that he was utterly surprised to look up and see Evanie and Jan Orm being herded down the corridor by half a dozen grim-faced guards.

"Trying to escape out of the South Gate," said one.

The Master turned cold, burning eyes on them, and then again looked sorrowfully down on the still perfection of the features of the Black Flame.

An Immortal placed a box at Martin Sair's side.

"Adrenalin!" snapped the Giver of Life, and took the tube the other handed him. "Amino-hyoscine! Daturamine!"

He pressed the pale flesh of the girl's arm, parted the closed lids to gaze into unseeing eyes. Finally, in the familiar manner of an ancient physician, he placed thumb and forefinger on her wrist, frowning as he felt for the faint throb of her pulse.

"Suffocated," he repeated. "Asphyxia."

In an agony of apprehension, his eyes blurred, Connor watched the slow rise and fall of her breast. Twice he fancied that the movement had ceased, and each time, with an almost inaudible gasp, the labored breathing recommenced. Then it did cease; he was positive, and a great wave of despair engulfed him.

"Her heart's stopping," Martin Sair said briefly.

Dying! Tom Connor gazed wildly about the corridor. Uncomprehending, he saw the grim light of triumph in the face of Evanie Sair as she looked coldly down on the fading glory of the Black Flame.

That such beauty should perish—be thrust into the earth—turn into a heap of crumbling bones! Unthinkable!

"Dying!" Connor croaked. "Dying!"

Martin Sair said only, "Now! Cardiacine! And get the oxygen mask ready."

"Dying!" he croaked again.

The Giver of Life glanced coldly at him.

"Dying?" He echoed impassively. "No. Dead. What of it?"

The Master turned grimly away and passed silently into the Throne Room with a word of brief command to the guards. They thrust Evanie Sair and Jan Orm before them, but Tom Connor did not miss the backward glance of triumph which the girl flung defiantly at him.

CONNOR gazed desolately on the lovely clay that had been the Black Flame of Urbs, wondering dully why Martin Sair still bent so attentively above her, still kept the pale wrist in his hand.

He started when the austere Immortal moved, placed his lips close to the cold ones of the girl, and rapped out:

"Now! The mask!"

The Giver of Life jammed a cone over the still face. There was a moment's silence; nothing happened. The scientist bent closer. Abruptly he placed his hands about the waist of the Princess, shook her violently, until her head rolled from side to side. He slapped her breast, her cheeks. And then, like the faint sighing of evening wind, she breathed.

A thin, muffled gasp—no more. But life-bearing oxygen flowed into her lungs, and the suspended metabolism of her body resumed its interrupted chemistries. Her breathing strengthened to a labored, whistling panting.

"Chain-Stokes breathing," muttered Martin Sair, whose genius had recalled a spirit already treading the pathways of eternity. The Black Flame, rekindled, burned dimly and flickeringly—but burned!

It was past Connor to comprehend. The transition from the deeps of desolation to the peak of hope was too vast to span in a moment. He merely gazed blankly on the mask-covered face of the Princess. When realization began to dawn, the cry of amazement and ecstasy strangled in his seared throat and became only an inchoate gurgle. He managed a choked question.

"Will she—live?" He moved as if to clasp her in his arms.

"Don't!" snapped Martin Sair. "On your life, don't touch her yet. Give her red corpuscles time to oxygenate. The girl's asphyxiated, suffocated, strangled! Do you want it all to do over again?" His eyes perceived the anguish in Connor's face, and he softened. "Of course she'll live. Did you think Death could so easily defeat Martin Sair? He has beaten me many a time, but never in so mild a contest as this!"

The great Immortal again bent over the girl. Her breathing had eased. For a terrible instant Connor thought it was ceasing once more. Martin Sair lifted the mask from the pallid, perfect features, still quiet as marble save for the sighing of her breathing.

"Now the *elixir vitae*," he said. "That will put fire into this chilly blood."

He took a phial of ruby liquid from the hand of his silent assistant, the same potent stimulant, it appeared, that had roused Evanie from the deathlike sleep of the Messenger.

The Princess was far too deep in unconsciousness to swallow. Martin Sair poured a tiny, trickling stream between her lips, no more than a few crimson drops. It was enough. As it made its fiery way down her throat she moaned and her exquisite face twisted as if in agony. The limp hands clenched convulsively into white fists.

MARTIN SAIR rose.

"You see," he said to his grave assistant, "there was nothing organically wrong. Oxygen-starved, that was all. The organism was undamaged. The blood had not even begun to coagulate. It was simply necessary to start the body machine working, since it was in perfect running order."

"Cardiacine is a gamble," his assistant said slowly. "I've had it rupture the hearts in some cases."

Martin Sair snorted. "Not with proper precautions. Daturamine and amino-hyoscine first. Cardiacine *is* powerful, of course." He mused. "I've seen it produce pulsations in the heart of a man ten days dead."

Connor ceased to listen. Cases! As if this were a medical case, this miracle! They droned on without even a glance at the pain-racked, exquisite face. Tom Connor touched her cold cheeks, kissed the soot-streaked forehead.

"Careful!" warned Martin Sair.

"But she breathes!" Connor whispered exultantly. "You're sure—certain she'll live?"

"She'll be conscious in ten minutes. A little sick, but conscious." The scientist's tone softened again. "In two days she'll be as bright as ever. After all, her body is the body of a twenty-year-old girl. She has youth, resilience. You can stop worrying."

Someone touched Connor's shoulder; a guard, who began droning, "*Orbis Terrarum Imperator*—"

"I won't go!" Tom Connor blazed. "I'm staying here!"

"She's out of danger, I tell you," insisted Martin Sair. "If she were ever in danger—with me at hand!"

Hesitantly then, Connor followed the guard, glancing apprehensively back at Margaret of Urbs, prone on the stone floor of the corridor. Then he reluctantly went on into the Throne Room.

CHAPTER XXVI

The Master Sits in Judgment

IN the Throne Room the ventilators had drawn out the steam and smoke-poisoned air, but moisture dripped from the walls and gathered in pools on the floor. The terrific destruction of the blast was evident everywhere. No single hanging remained on walls or windows. Everything inflammable was in cinders, and the very floor was still almost blistering hot.

The far end was a mass of indescribable ruin, debris from the shattered wall, even fragments of the diorite bases of the thrones. The air, despite the humming ventilators, was stifling in the radiations from floor and walls.

The Master sat upon the half-melted wreckage of his throne, his stern eyes on Evanie and Jan Orm, who stood between guards before him.

The frightened look on Evanie's face moved Connor despite the injuries she had done him. After all, she had nursed him out of the very grave and given him, penniless and strange, a home and a place in this bizarre world. She was clinging frantically to the arm of Jan, who stood morose and impassive before the Master.

"THOMAS," the ruler said, "I can get nothing from this sullen pair. Tell me what you know of this."

Connor met Evanie's terrified gaze, and it wrung pity from him. He owed much to this girl. Was it any more than right that he help her now? At least he could confuse the issue, prolong it until he could obtain the aid of Margaret of Urbs.

"I did it myself!" he said promptly.

There was no change in the Master's face.

"You?" he repeated mildly. "How?"

"I made the bomb in Martin Sair's laboratory," Connor said, with a quick warning glance at Evanie. "I made it at night, and smuggled it in here during the darkness. That's all."

"Indeed? After your oath, Thomas? And I had flattered myself that you were my friend—my esteemed friend."

There was something inscrutable in the Master's face. The grave eyes surveyed Connor sorrowfully as he fingered a beam-pistol.

"I think," said the Master, slipping out the weapon, "that I will destroy you once and for all, Connor." He leveled the gun.

"Wait!" shrieked Jan Orm. "He didn't do it—I did!" He paused as the Master's cool eyes shifted to him. "I had it made in Ormon and smuggled here to me. I hid it in the Throne Room early this morning, before any one was about!"

"Well," said the Master slowly, "I might believe that both of you had a hand in it."

His eyes flickered over Evanie.

She drew herself erect.

"What's the use?" she said dully. "I won't have you two shielding me. I did it. I had the bomb smuggled to me by an amphimorph, who rode a bubble down the mains to the pool in the Gardens. That's the truth."

"Suppose, then," said the Master, "I destroy all three of you, and thus assure myself that the guilty one is punished."

"I don't care!" Evanie flung out defiantly. "I'm sorry I failed, but at least I've extinguished the Black Flame of Urbs—and I'm glad!"

THE ruler's eyes held a curious light as he gazed over their heads. A step sounded behind them. Connor whirled to see Margaret of Urbs approaching, supported by the arm of Martin Sair. Soot-stained, the whole slim length of her right leg red and blistered by the blast, her right cheek inflamed by the contact with the steaming floor, she was yet so incredibly lovely that she was breath-taking. Tom Connor sprang to her side, slipped a steadying arm about her as she swayed willingly against him. Evanie, so pale she seemed about to faint, was leaning weakly against Jan Orm.

"What's all this, Joaquin?" asked the Princess.

"Merely an attempt to fix responsibility for the bombing, my dear."

"And have you fixed it?"

"All three claim the honor."

"I see." She paused. "Well, I can throw some light on the mystery. *I* am responsible for the bomb explosion. It was an accident. I was watching some detonol crystallize, in Martin Sair's room, and forgot to take it off the burner. I was stunned by the concussion, and Thomas Connor rushed in and guided me out. Somewhere in the Throne Room I suppose I must have been overcome."

She paused again, staring back at the Master.

"Don't you see? Each of these three suspects the others and each is trying to shield his friends. But I did it; it was an accident."

She slipped from Connor's arm and sank wearily to the steps that led to her ruined Throne.

"I burn!" she muttered, and sipped the goblet of water that a guard held to her lips.

Quizzically, the Master gazed down at her.

"You know," he said, suddenly stern, "that to me the one unforgivable sin is the thwarting of my plans. Not even you, my sister, may stand in the way of them. While I live, I am the Master. I shall yield only when a power arises strong enough to overthrow me, for that will tell me that my work is done. When that occurs, I shall have guided humanity as far as I am able along the path of Destiny, but until then—*I* am the Master."

His face, austere as an image in basalt, loomed over them. For the first time Connor glimpsed dimly the colossus behind the mild mask, the diamond hardness below the silk that sheathed it. Then the ruler smiled.

"I suppose I cannot doubt my sister's word. I release all of you."

He arose and descended from the throne.

Connor followed a step or two. "I'm interested to learn," he whispered, "which of us you believe."

The Master smiled again. "Haven't I just said?" He turned away. "Of course, if I were curious, I could ask you and Jan Orm how you knew what time to set the blast. I hadn't decided on a time for the Conclave until I had it announced in the corridors, and the bomb must have been placed between that moment and the arrival of the guards."

"Or the Princess is telling the truth," suggested Tom Connor.

"Some day Margaret shall explain why detonol causes a cloud of steam," observed the Master. He continued absently, "Evanie has good blood in her. So has Jan Orm." Then he was gone, followed by Martin Sair and the guards.

CONNOR returned to Margaret of Urbs. Evanie's incredulous eyes were fixed on the Princess as she whispered:

"Why did you do that?"

"Because I thought it would please Tom Connor." Margaret of Urbs said frankly.

Evanie stared at her with dawning comprehension.

"The Black Flame herself burned!" she murmured wonderingly. "I see now why we can still learn from the ancients. They're miracle workers." But the next instant her brown eyes glittered vindictively. "I'm glad at least that the conquest of the Flame was during my lifetime." She bowed half in wonderment, half in mockery, before Connor. "I salute the Prince-consort of Urbs!"

The Princess flushed faintly, and Connor laughed and glanced away. Something that sparkled in a pile of ashes caught his eye. He stooped to retrieve the marvelous crystalline flower, glowing brilliant and indestructible, untouched — even brightened—by the blast.

"What is this?" he asked.

"My moon-orchid," said Margaret of Urbs. "The only perfect one ever found."

He grinned and turned to Evanie.

"I promised you one. Here—our wedding present to you and Jan."

"Engagement present, rather," said the Princess. "I owe you two somewhat more than you realize." She ignored both Evanie's silence and Jan

Orm's protestations of mingled embarrassment, thanks, and refusal as he held the priceless thing. "Tom," she murmured, "would you mind if we were—alone?"

It was dismissal. Jan and Evanie backed away with half awe-struck glances at Connor. He dropped beside the weary Princess of Urbs, slipping his arm tenderly about her scorched shoulders. Even in the sultriness of that blasted chamber she shivered, her teeth chattered, so recently had the icy face of death withdrawn.

He drew her close, then halted as he heard a distant, thin clamor beyond the windows.

"What's that?" he asked sharply. "Another revolution?"

"Just the newspapers, I guess. You've been in them frequently of late." She smiled wanly. "As often as I, this past week. The Weed who sustained the ionic beams—revealed as a living ancient—proclaimed for immortality—the rescuer of Margaret of Urbs—and now—" She quoted ironically, "'Margaret to Wed? Romance Rumored with Rescuer!'" She nestled closer to him. "Oh, the downfall of the Black Flame will be well publicized, never fear! Let them add this to their pictures and vision broadcasts. I don't care!"

"Pictures? What pictures?" He glanced about the vast deserted chamber.

"From the seeing room, of course! Don't you suppose we were watched all during the blast, even in here, as much as the steam permitted? Don't you know we're being watched now, photographed for papers, and broadcasts? You're world news, Tom." She frowned. "They must have thought me mad to rush into that inferno with you, out of safety. Well—I was mad!"

"You can't even die in privacy here!" Connor said bluntly. "Do you suppose"—his voice dropped to a whisper—"they heard what you—what we said?"

"Above the roar of the blast? No. I thought of that when I—said it."

HE smiled at that. It was so typical of the utterly strange and fascinating character of the girl. He drew her against him, and felt the pressure of something hard in his belt—the ivory Venus, still safe, still immaculate in its perfection, since it had been on the left side, shielded by his own flesh when he passed the blast.

"I know what I shall give you as a wedding present," he said slowly. "The original Venus de Milo. The most beautiful statue of the ancient world."

She smiled and a trace of the old mockery showed. "And I know what I shall give you," she said. "Life!"

"Immortality?"

"Not immortality. Life." She turned her emerald eyes on him. "Tom, is it very hard to give up the idea of children? Men want children, don't they?"

"Most of us do—but it's a happiness well lost for you." He glanced down at her. "Listen, can't this immortality thing be undone? Wouldn't it be possible for Martin Sair to render you mortal for—a few years?"

"Of course. Further exposure to the hard rays will do it."

"And then," eagerly, "could we—"

The smile she flashed at him had in it a touch of heaven. "Yes," she said exultant, but instantly a cloud chased away the smile. "But don't you remember what sort of children women bear who've been too long in the ray?" she whispered. "Amphimorphs, Tom! Would you like to be father to a little amphimorph?"

He shuddered. "Thank you. We'll do as we are then."

She burst suddenly into laughter almost as mocking as her old self. Then she was as suddenly serious, tender.

"Tom," she murmured, "I won't tease you. That will be my gift to you. Martin Sair can do what you wish. There is some leeway to the process—enough, perhaps, for a single time. I'll give you five years of mortality. My permanent age is twenty now; it will be twenty-five then. But who in all the world could have anticipated that the Black Flame would assume motherhood—and like

it? Tom, that's my gift to you—life! Kiss me!"

For a moment of ecstasy he felt her lips quiver against his.

"Two boys and a girl!" she murmured. "Won't we, Tom?"

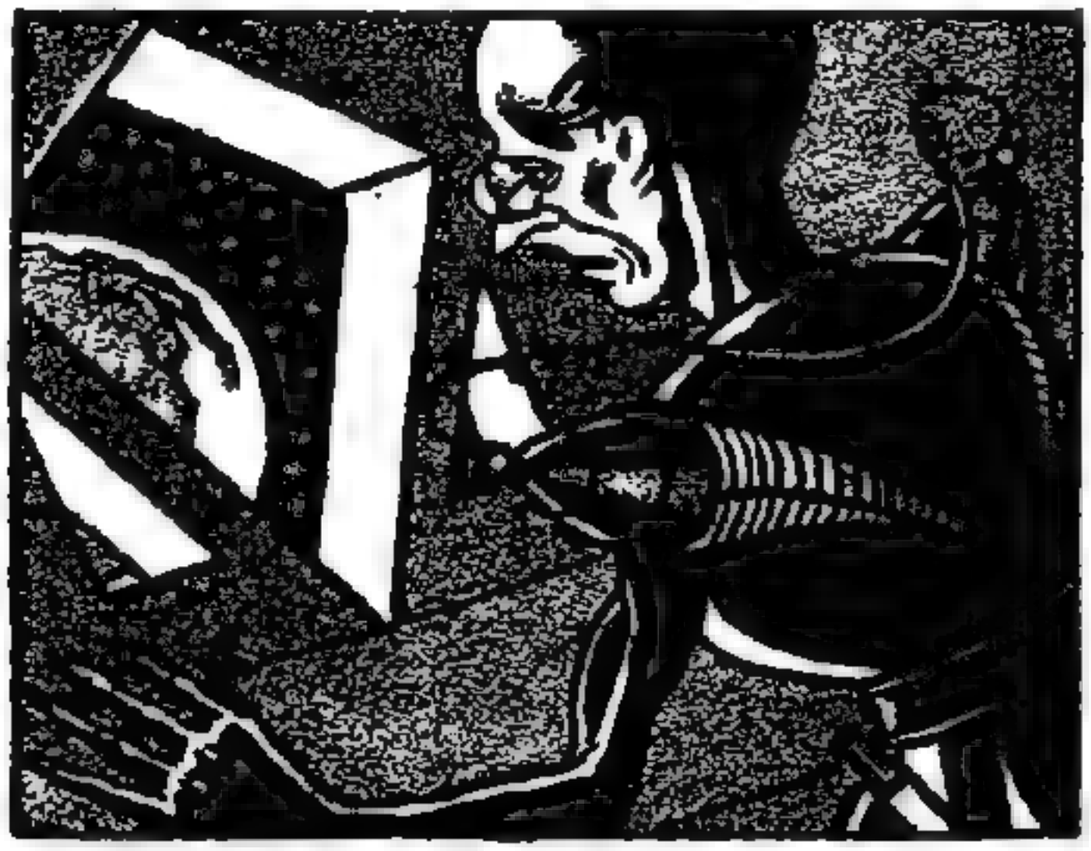
"And can Martin Sair," he asked ironically, "fix that for us too?"

"Of course. Two boys like you, Tom." She was suddenly dreamy-eyed.

"But not a girl like you."

"Why not?"

"Because," Tom Connor laughed, "I don't think society could stand a second Black Flame!"



IN THE NEXT ISSUE

●

THE IMPOSSIBLE WORLD

A Complete Book-Length Novel of
a Miracle Planet

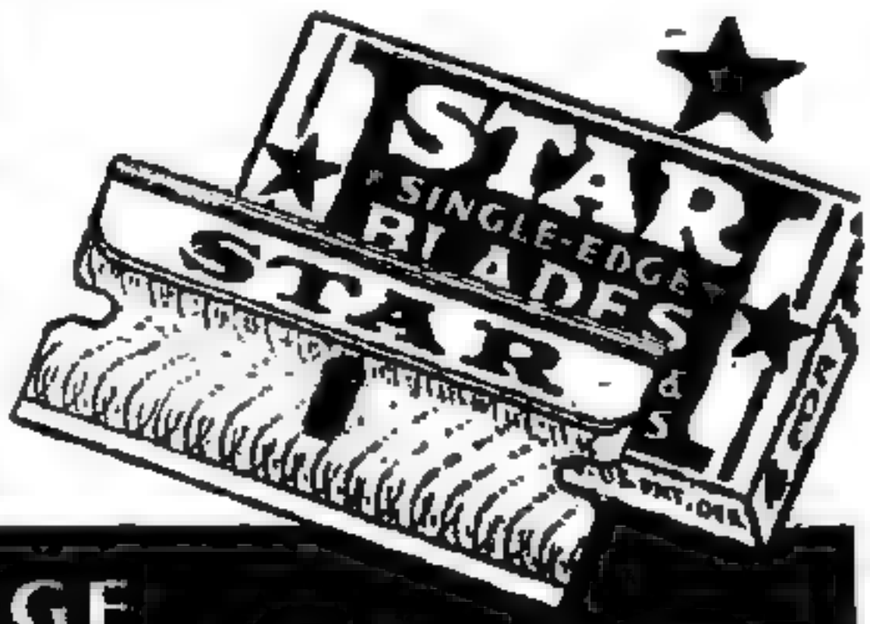
By EANDO BINDER

●

PLUS OTHER STORIES BY SCIENTIFICTION'S FAVORITES

WARNING TO CRANKS

If you want to stay cranky, look out for Star Single-edge Blades! They're so keen, they're so gentle with a tender skin that if you're not careful, you'll be smiling all over. Famous since 1880! Star Blades cost little: 4 for 10¢. Star Blade Division, Brooklyn, N. Y.



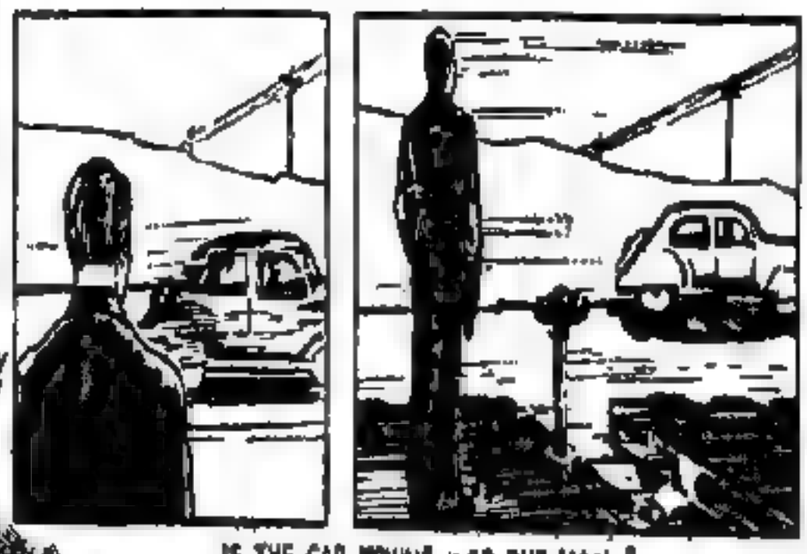
STAR SINGLE-EDGE BLADES 4 FOR 10¢
FOR GEM AND EVER-READY RAZORS

THEY CHANGED THE WORLD

BY JACK BINDER

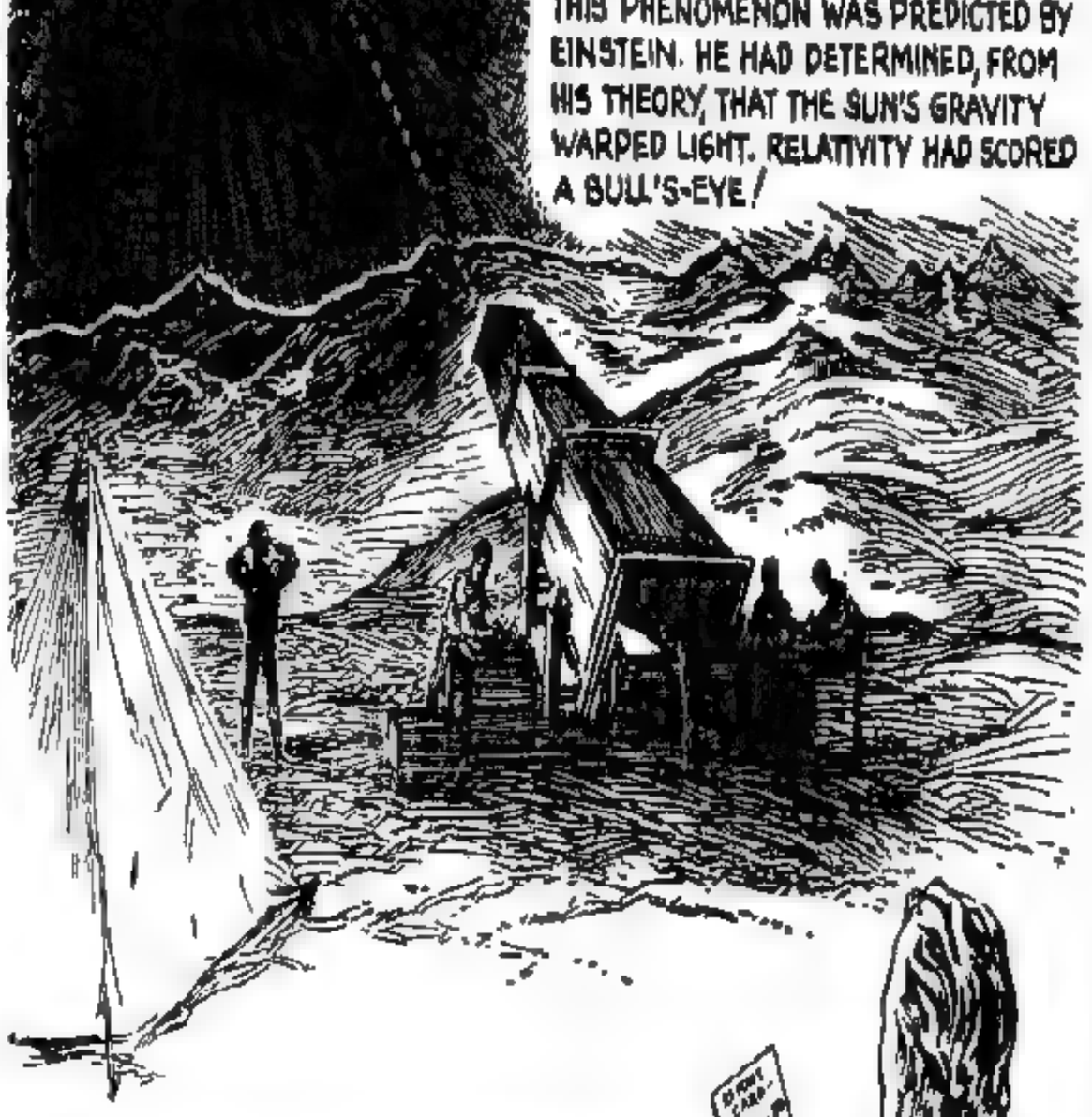
ALBERT EINSTEIN
BORN AT ULM, GERMANY, MARCH 14, 1879.

EINSTEIN PICTURED A NEW UNIVERSE, WHEN ONLY 26 YEARS OLD. SPACE WAS CURVED-GRAVITY WAS A WARP OF SPACE-TIME WAS A FOURTH DIMENSION. HIS NAME IS ALMOST SYNONYMOUS WITH THE WORD "RELATIVITY"-THE GREATEST SCIENTIFIC CONCEPT KNOWN TO MAN. HIS THEORY SHOWED THAT MOTION IS PURELY RELATIVE, DEPENDING ON THE VIEWPOINT.



IS THE CAR MOVING — OR THE MAN ?
(RELATIVITY'S ANSWER = EITHER ONE)

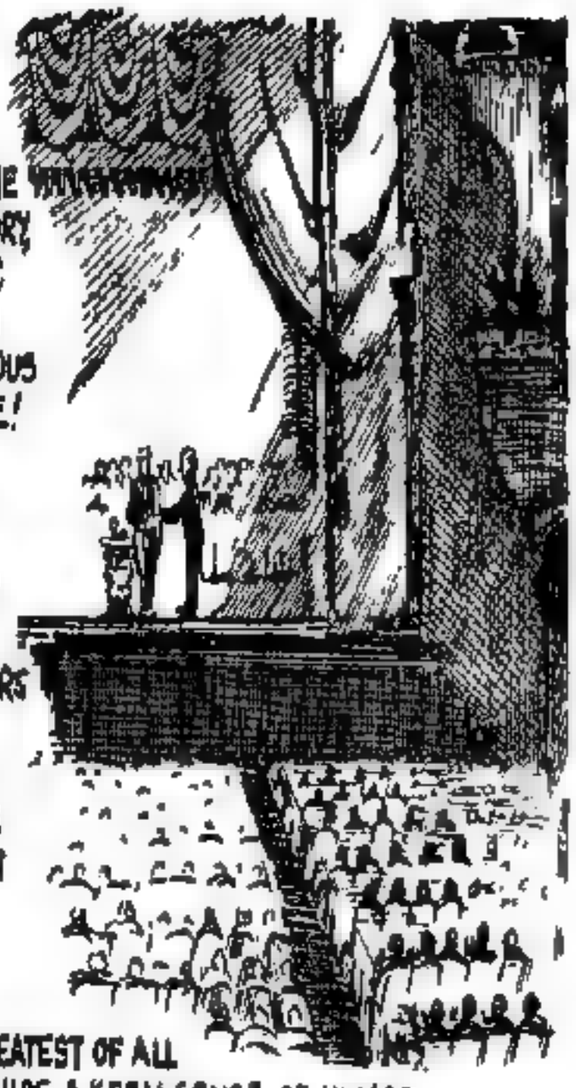
SCIENTISTS SCOFFED AT HIS AMAZING THEORY AT FIRST. THEN, IN 1919, THE BRAZIL SOLAR ECLIPSE EXPEDITION PHOTOGRAPHED A *BENT* LIGHT RAY. THIS PHENOMENON WAS PREDICTED BY EINSTEIN. HE HAD DETERMINED, FROM HIS THEORY, THAT THE SUN'S GRAVITY WARPED LIGHT. RELATIVITY HAD SCORED A BULL'S-EYE!



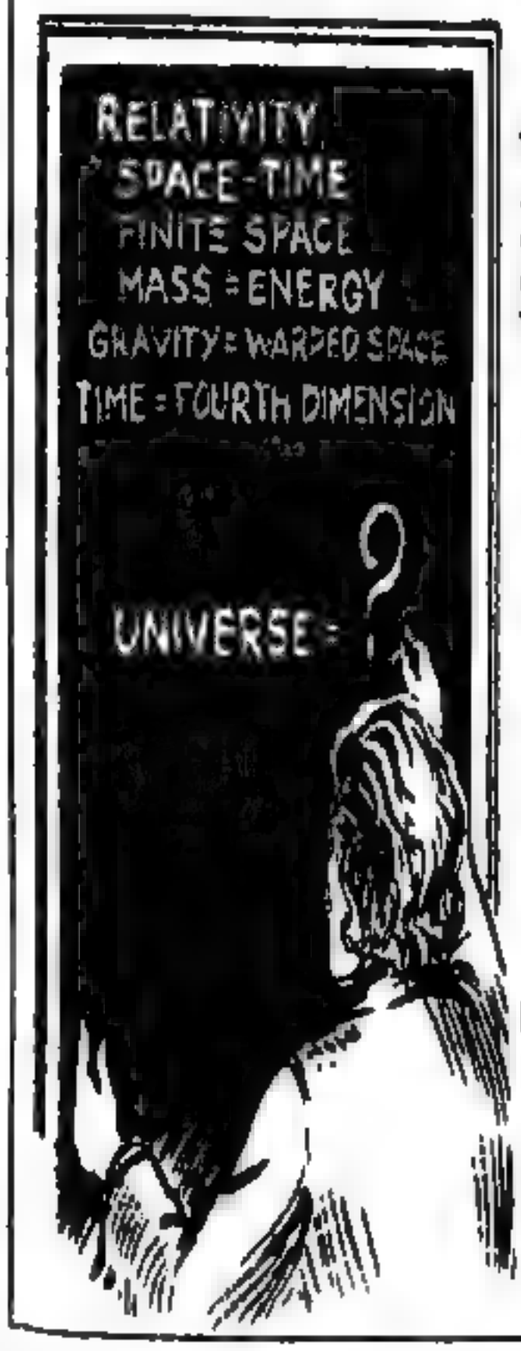
AS A YOUTH, EINSTEIN READ PHILOSOPHICAL BOOKS, PARTICULARLY KANT, IN PREFERENCE TO SCIENTIFIC WORKS. IT IS SAID THAT ONCE, AS A STUDENT, HE FAILED IN MATHEMATICS!

EINSTEIN'S THEORY IS COMPOSED OF TWO PARTS. HIS FIRST, *SPECIAL LAWS OF RELATIVITY*, (1905) DEALT ONLY WITH RELATIVE MOTION. TEN YEARS LATER, WHEN THE WORLD WAS AFLAME WITH WAR, HE BROUGHT OUT HIS COMPLETE THEORY, EMBRACING DYNAMICS, AND ELECTROMAGNETIC PHENOMENA. WHILE THE WARLORDS HAD BEEN TEARING DOWN CIVILIZATION, THE QUIET, STUDIOUS EINSTEIN HAD BEEN BUILDING A NEW UNIVERSE!

IN 1921, EINSTEIN WAS AWARDED THE NOBEL PRIZE FOR PHYSICS. THE WORLD HAD FINALLY RECOGNIZED HIS GENIUS. WITH CHARACTERISTIC GENEROSITY, HE GAVE EVERY BIT OF THE LARGE SUM OF PRIZE MONEY TO CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS. EINSTEIN CONSIDERS GALILEO AND NEWTON THE GREATEST OF ALL SCIENTIFIC MINDS. BUT HE HIMSELF STANDS ABOVE THEM FOR SHEER GENIUS. IT BECAME A FABLE THAT ONLY TWELVE OF THE WORLD'S MOST BRILLIANT MEN COULD UNDERSTAND EINSTEIN'S FORMULAE!



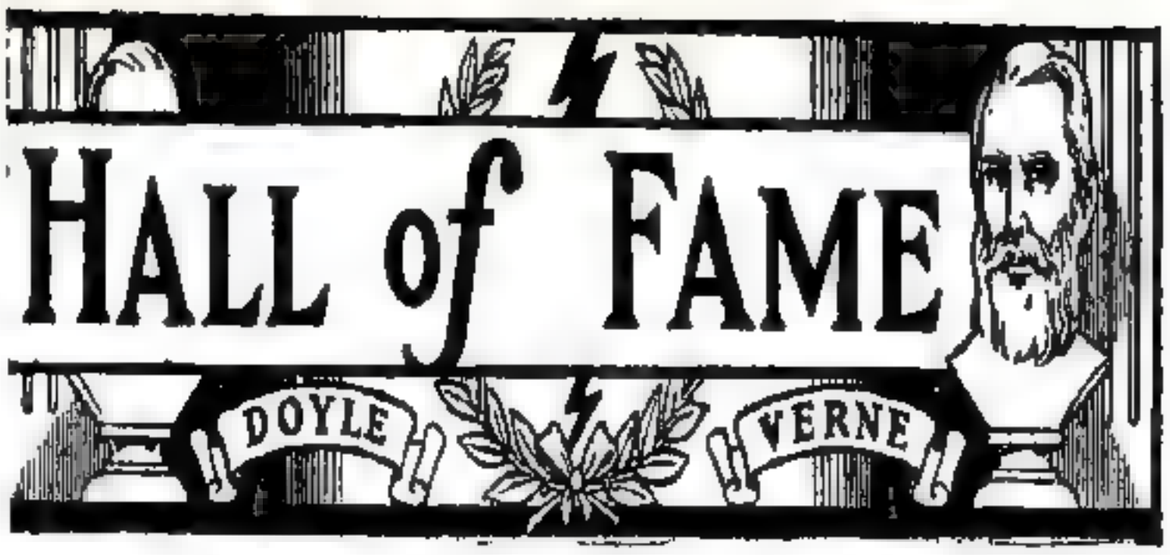
THIS GREATEST OF ALL SCIENTISTS HAS A KEEN SENSE OF HUMOR. ONCE, WHEN ASKED FOR A SIMPLE EXPLANATION OF RELATIVITY, HE REPLIED: "IF YOU HOLD A PRETTY GIRL ON YOUR LAP FOR AN HOUR, IT SEEMS LIKE A MINUTE. BUT IF YOU SIT ON A HOT STOVE FOR A MINUTE, IT SEEMS LIKE AN HOUR!" IN BETWEEN HIS PROFOUND MENTAL STUDIES, EINSTEIN'S LIFELONG RECREATION HAS BEEN PLAYING THE VIOLIN, AND HE PLAYS IT WELL!



AFTER THE NOBEL AWARD, EINSTEIN BECAME THE WORLD'S MOST HONORED SAVANT. A STEADY STREAM OF FAMOUS PEOPLE VISITED HIM IN HIS QUIET HOME. RENOWNED SCIENTISTS SAT IN HIS CLASSES WITH THE YOUNGER STUDENTS. THEY HAD TO ACCEPT A NEW EXPLANATION FOR MANY PHENOMENA OF THE COSMOS. OBJECTS TRAVELING AT SPEEDS APPROACHING THAT OF LIGHT SUFFER AN APPARENT CONTRACTION IN LENGTH BECAUSE OF THE RELATIVITY FACTOR APPLIED TO TIME. OUR EYES CANNOT DISTINGUISH THE CHANGE IN TIME-INTERVALS CAUSED BY INCREASED VELOCITY PARALLEL LINES *DO* MEET, SAID EINSTEIN, DUE TO CURVATURE OF SPACE ITSELF!

EXILED FROM GERMANY, THE AGING SCIENTIST NOW WANTS TO BECOME AN AMERICAN CITIZEN. HE TEACHES PHYSICS AT PRINCETON. NOT SATISFIED WITH HIS PREVIOUS GREAT WORK, EINSTEIN IS TODAY TRYING TO ENCOMPASS ALL THE UNIVERSE IN ONE SINGLE MASTER-FORMULA!

Next Issue: THE LIFE OF MADAME CURIE, DISCOVERER OF RADIUM



THE ETERNAL MAN

By D. D. SHARP

HERBERT ZULERICH was a big, heavy-framed man with a tangled mop of shaggy hair which lay back from his sloping forehead and clustered about the collar of his dark coat. His nose was big and prominent, jutting like a huge peak upon his face, and his mouth was a deep-lined canyon between that peak and the bulge of his chin.

Zulerich's habits were as strange as his face, and ponderous as his big body. How he lived no one knew, and no one knew either how he managed to maintain his formidable array of test tubes and retorts. In his laboratory was every conceivable kind of peculiar glass, holding liquids of all colors.

Zulerich had been at one time a chemist of somewhat more than local fame, but of late years he had become a recluse, staying alone most of the time in his big stone house just back of the highway where the constant stream of autos seemed to disturb him but little.

In truth they disturbed him a great deal. Some days he would watch them in their hurry as they drove furiously along the straight line of paved roadway, and into his face would come gloom and melancholy. Into his large blue eyes would come a hurt look, and an odd feeling of sympathy for those who seemed so full of life, so gay, so thoughtless, would creep into his heart.

"Death! Death!" the old man would whisper, "Man goes through long years of preparation for the few days of accomplishment before the conqueror destroys all."

"So much preparation," he would whisper as he shook his big head. "So many brilliant minds polished and blazing for an hour, like roses grown and tended to be cut for an evening's bloom; hands so skillfully trained, and so soon folded quietly at rest."

That the old man was in quest of some great secret, everyone who knew him had long ago suspected. But what that secret was, no one knew and few could hazard even a guess.

The truth was, Zulerich's mind was obsessed by a single thought—the appalling waste of death. And since science and invention were conquering the other enemies of man's existence, Zulerich had set out, after the example of Ponce de Leon, to discover the elements which might be combined to give man eternal life.

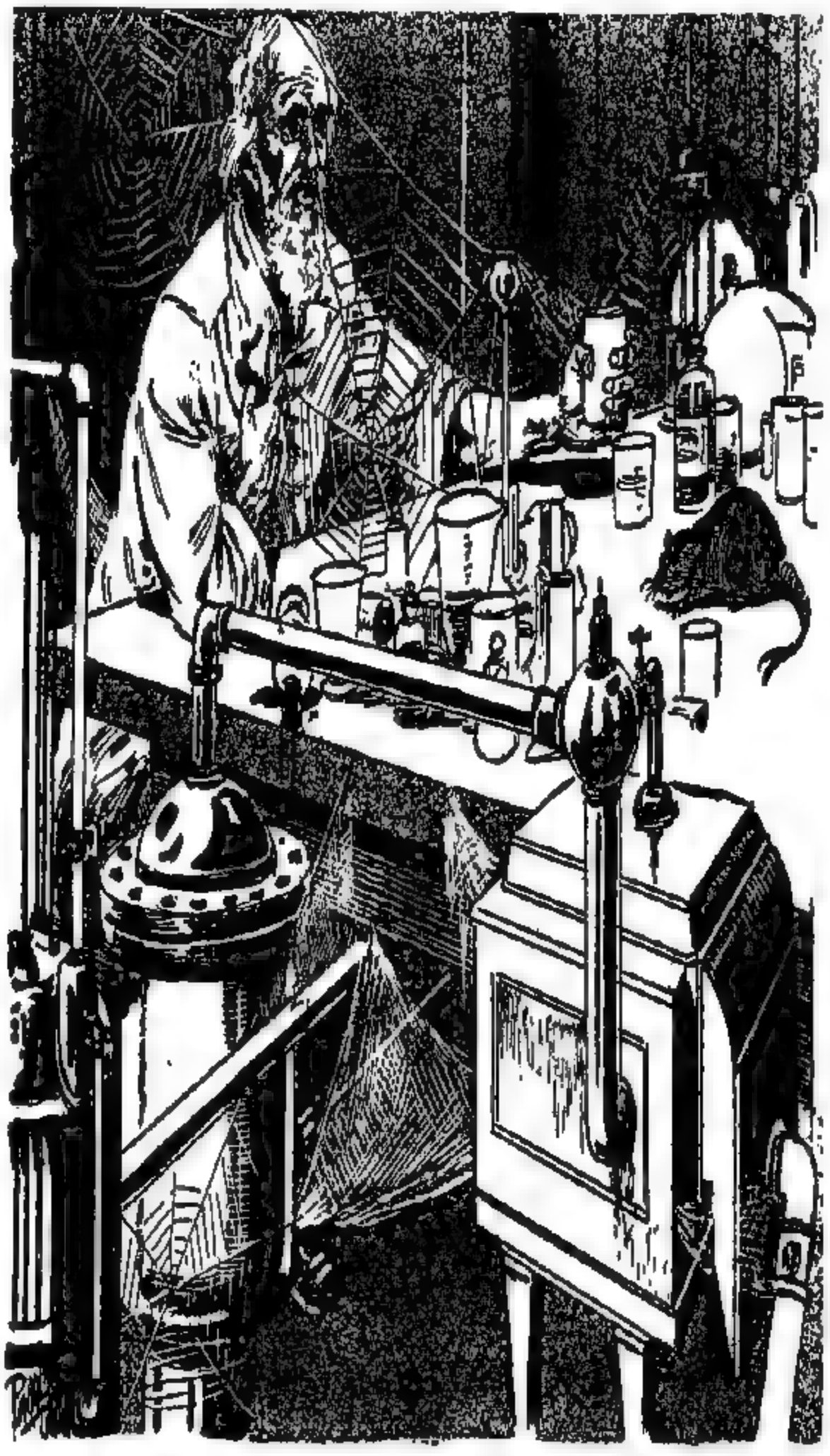
SOME stories are forgotten almost as soon as printed. Others stand the test of time.

Because "The Eternal Man," by D. D. Sharp, has stood this test, we are nominating it for SCIENTIFICTION'S HALL OF FAME.

In each issue we will nominate—and reprint—another favorite of the past. This department has been inaugurated in response to scores of requests from science fiction readers.

In writing to STARTLING STORIES, please vote for your favorites. We will adopt as many of your suggestions as possible. We are endeavoring to bring you the very best that has been written in this field, and to make realities of your memories.

By thus bringing a new permanence to the science fiction gems of yesterday, we hope to perform a real service to the science fiction devotees of today and tomorrow.



Still old Zulerich sat, a corpse but unburned, motionless but alive

A fantastic quest, seemingly hopeless, yet Zulerich felt that he was making progress. He had discovered things which had astonished even him. Some of his experiments had awed and stupefied him, and then he made a discovery which gave him a decided fright.

HE had been experimenting with unicellular organisms, and had found that they did not behave as inorganic chemicals did. He knew that the reaction of those animalcules was distinctly physiological and not merely physical, organic and not purely chemical. They did not resemble any known chemicals, for they reacted as individuals and not as mere materials. This discovery, he found, was confirmed by Jennings in his book "Behavior of Unicellular Organisms."

Old Zulerich had studied the intricate processes of cellular division and multiplication, hoping to penetrate the law of the organism and discover what it was that, at the peak of growth, prevented further cleavage of cells. In short, he wanted to find the principle which confined the limits of size and growth. Find what it was that caused the cells of a living body to increase and multiply until maturity and then cease growing except when incited by a cut or other accident to the tissue. Why should a cell become active to replace wounded flesh, yet balk at rebuilding vital tissues, such as the lungs; or refuse to replace a lost tooth more than once.

He experimented in numerous ways to provoke cell growth, trying to divine whether they had individualities of their own or whether they were bounded by the individuality of the whole. He wanted to find whether cells had an intelligence which caused them to do the remarkable things necessary to their coordination in the body.

Zulerich found out many things; mystifying things which no amount of scientific theory could possibly explain. He perfected chemicals which, applied to a rabbit's head, caused its hair to grow so long as to make it necessary for him to gather it into a bag. And even then the weight of it grew so great that the rabbit could no longer drag its load and he killed the animal out of mercy. But still its hair grew and grew.

His high-walled back-yard soon held some monstrous freaks produced by his chemicals; dogs with heads as big as water barrels and bodies of normal size; rats with bodies as big as cows and heads no bigger than peanuts. And one day he applied a chemical to a horse's eyes and the eyes grew out of their sockets like long ropes of white sinew with great knobs of gelatin-like iris—limp flabby canes that dragged upon the ground. The effect of this last experiment so cut the kind soul of Zulerich that he killed all the monstrosities and recoiled from the thought of making more. Then he looked again from his window over the wide world where death laid waste, sighed, tightened his lips and plunged into his work again.

It was not growth that Zulerich wanted. He was quite content that man should retain his present stature. What he desired was to increase man's years.

And then he discovered it. He did not need to wait and watch until the end of time to determine whether or not cells would eventually die. He knew that they would *not* die. A few drops of the pale green fluid in the graduating glass he held in his hand would permit any man to live eternally. For he had at last found the combination he sought; the chemical which continued life without the necessity of decay.

AFTER a year of experiment upon his cells he tried a drop upon a rat. He caught the rat in one hand and held his medicine dropper with its pale green fluid in the other. But, as the dropper released its globule, the rat moved its head and the drop hit the side of its face, trickled down and spread about its throat. It left a scar upon the hair, a peculiar scar like a question mark. Zulerich tried again with a second drop with better success. The rat swallowed it.

Zulerich watched carefully. The

animal's heart seemed to cease beating. The lungs became motionless. And yet the rat lived, with the fire of life in its pink eyes. It lived on, day after day, week after week, month after month, without the slightest loss of weight or sign of hunger or thirst. It lived with its tiny soul imprisoned inside it.

Yet even then Zulerich dared not himself drink the elixir, though his work was exhausting his strength and his heart was growing weak—its flutterings made him take fright at times. For there was a flaw in his experiment. True, the animal lived without breath, food or water. But it was entirely *unable to move!* Looking at it one would take it for dead, except for that glow in its fierce little eyes and the entire absence of decay.

Zulerich set out to mend the flaw. He worked feverishly now, knowing his time was short. He did not want to die with success just within his reach. He did not want to come so near offering mankind the boon it craved most of all, only to fail when in sight of his goal.

A year passed before Zulerich found the ingredient lacking in his pale greenish drops. The very simplicity of the thing had caused him to overlook it in the beginning, and his discovery of it was almost ludicrously accidental.

One day he had a pail containing a solution of washing soda near the windows and was washing down the dusty glass so that he might see out over the blighted world and gain strength from its curse to continue his work. He would allow no one else in his laboratory and washed the windows himself.

A few spattering drops fell into the motionless, upturned mouth of the rat where it stood upon the casement. Its mouth was open in the same position it had held when Zulerich had forced it to receive the life preserving drops. It had stood there, a tiny, paralyzed, living statue, while the four seasons of the year had gone by. Today Zulerich had thought to remove the animal from the windows before beginning to wash them. But as he had grown older he had grown more absent minded, less able to use the care and forethought of former times; and this time his carelessness produced an amazing result.

No sooner had the soda dropped into the rat's mouth when it squealed and scurried for cover. The very next instant it was out, nibbling a crust of cracker the parrot had dropped upon the floor.

Overjoyed, Zulerich watched the rat regain the use of its muscles. But anxiety soon crept into his joy. The rat developed hunger. Hunger forebode decay. Decay meant death.

Pondering this, he trembled. He was old, he had not much time to watch and wait. Even now, as a result of his suspense and relief over the new discovery of the soda drops, his heart was fluttering alarmingly. And there was something new, frightening, in its flutterings. Had his time come at last, now, when his precious experiment was almost completed, perhaps perfected, but not yet given to the life-hungry world?

All the legends he had ever read of the discovery of elixirs of life had had their fruits frosted just before the eating. Was it to be so with him? Was this the end?

He thought of his drops! Quickly he stepped over to the table. He snatched up the pale green vial, dusty from long idleness on the shelf. He measured off the drops. His hand trembled so that the vial itself dropped to the floor and split its precious fluid. But he drank the drops in the measuring glass. Then he reached for the soda water sitting just within reach of the touch of his hand.

HE could not move! He had forgotten, forgotten that he would be unable to bring the soda to his mouth. He had overlooked a very vital thing. What was to be done? Nothing. There was nothing he could do but sit and wait—a neighbor might pass. He sat immovable, as though cut in stone. He could not move even an eyelid. He was frightened.

No neighbor passed who saw him. A week went by.

The rat played all over the room. It came out mockingly upon the table before him. Zulerich regarded it closely. It was not breathing.

Another week passed before anyone came into the house. The rat had become bolder and Zulerich had used his enforced leisure to observe it. He knew his experiment had been a success. The rat only consumed food to replace its physical energy. It needed fuel only for movement, running about the room, which of course was a method of decay. But the rat needed no food to support its life. Zulerich knew he had discovered the great secret. He had attained perpetual life, life which needed food only for its physical energies, for movement, not for life itself.

Then, as has been said, a neighbor peeped in. The neighbor's first look of uneasiness gave way to one of pained sorrow. His face became melancholy as he saw old Zulerich sitting motionless upon his stool beside his chemicals. That lack of motion could mean only one thing. Zulerich tried to cry out but his voice, like his limbs, was paralyzed. He tried to croak, even to whisper, but there was no noise at all. Finally he put all his appeal into the fierce, cold fire of his living eyes. The man saw those eyes, bright and living. He slammed the door and fled the room.

Zulerich became a world wonder. No one knew what had happened to him. They thought he was dead, they surmised that he had spilled some mysterious compound over him which had embalmed him with the look of life still in his eyes.

Undertakers came from long distances to study him as he sat in his laboratory. They pried and tested among the fluids in the bottles. Time passed, months, years, and still old Zulerich sat, a corpse but unburied, motionless but alive. But they did not think he was alive. They believed he had discovered some marvelous embalming fluid. His house became a kind of museum in which he was the only exhibit.

Old Zulerich, growing no older at all, knew all this, for he sat there, in a glass case now, hearing all they said and seeing before his eyes all that was done.

And in the dead of night the rat with its selfishness and eternal life, and the unselfish chemist in his glass case, would meet again. The rat would scamper across the top of the glass case in which Zulerich sat as stiffly as though sculptured in stone. It would sit upon the table before him and stare at him with red spiteful eyes. And Zulerich always knew it by the peculiar scar upon its neck. The rat had what he lacked. For one long year the rat had been frozen, as the man was now, and the man had then given it movement as well as life.

Could the rat do as much for the man? Would it if it could? It hated him. It never brought him the few drops of alkali he craved.

And one day they packed Zulerich carefully in a case and took him away from the place that had been his home. When the case was opened he found himself in a lofty building with the mummy of a Pharaoh on one side of him and musty relics of other ages all around him. He recognized the old building, for in other days he had loved to visit it, letting his fancies wander over these fragments of a vanished age.

As he sat there upon his stool, protected within his glass case, the unalterable line of his vision vaulted the narrow aisles below him and gazed through the great glass of a tall window in the opposite wall.

OUT there he watched the throngs passing. People of a day. Men who yesterday were babes in mothers' arms, today fighting up the long and difficult ladder for their fragment of success, to leap tomorrow into oblivion from their allotted rung.

Things changed, manners, customs, techniques, ways of life. But Zulerich grew no older, Zulerich did not change. And the rat—the rat to which Zulerich had given the gift of movement—it too, wherever it was, lived on also.

In all the years upon earth it was bound that these two, rat and man,

should meet again, the rat with its selfish greed and the chemist with his unselfish dream. Had the rat been seeking him so that it might gloat over him as it used to do? So that it might scamper upon his case and deride him with its motion? The night roundsman of the museum saw the rat, beat it with his broom, mangled it with his big heel, left it upon the floor until morning so that the cleaners might take it away.

But before the cleaners came the next morning one of the scientists who was studying Zulerich saw the rat lying there, upon the floor before the case, its body mangled, its eyes so bright and full of pain. He stooped, examined it. An exclamation broke from him. The rat's heart and lungs were quiet, it seemed quite dead, yet its eyes had the same living look of the man Zulerich in the glass case.

THUS it came about that the rat, too, was placed under observation, set in a tiny case upon a perch just in front of the glass tomb in which old Zulerich sat looking out upon the great world through the big window. The rat cut off part of the vision of the old man. His vision in frozen focus, he had perforce to gaze straight into the eyes of the creature to whom he had given eternal life, and to which, mangled now by broom and heel, had been given eternal pain as well.

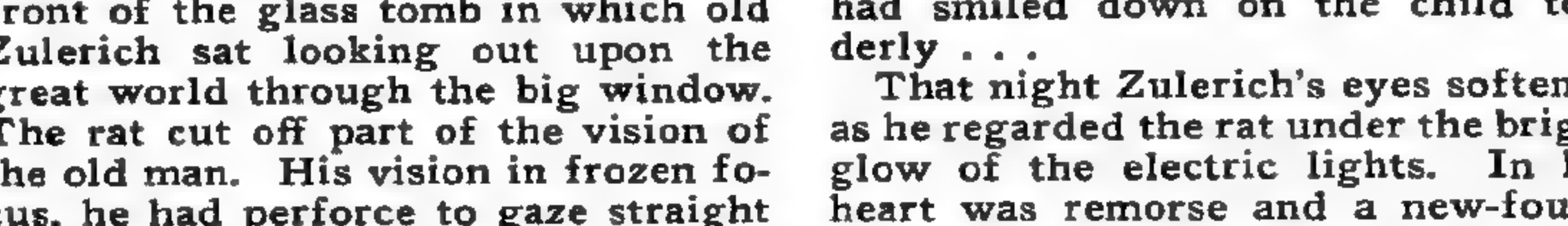
Life streamed by under the old man's gaze, burning up with decay. Yet he held the secret all those people so much desired. He held the connecting link between them and eternal life, a few drops of alkaline water. The wires of communication were down and none had the wisdom nor the wit to raise them up. *He* had the secret, they had the power, if they only knew.

Eager and anxious, weary and bowed down, discouraged and broken, the people of the world tramped by; torrents of wasted motion. The undying man and the undying rat stared hatefully at each other. The undying man's mind kept on working, everlastingly seeking for some means of breaking the paralysis of his body so that he might give eternal life to humanity.

Then he learned a great lesson from a small child.

The child, entering the museum with her father, saw the mangled rat, saw the pain and the desire for death in its eyes. And the child begged her father to kill the little rat as he had killed her little dog after the automobile had run over it. The father had smiled down on the child tenderly . . .

That night Zulerich's eyes softened as he regarded the rat under the bright glow of the electric lights. In his heart was remorse and a new-found wisdom. He was glad now that he had been unable to give mankind his magic formula. For he knew now, past all doubt and deep down in the living soul within his undying body, what the true answer was to all his dreams: he knew that one should improve life before trying to lengthen it.



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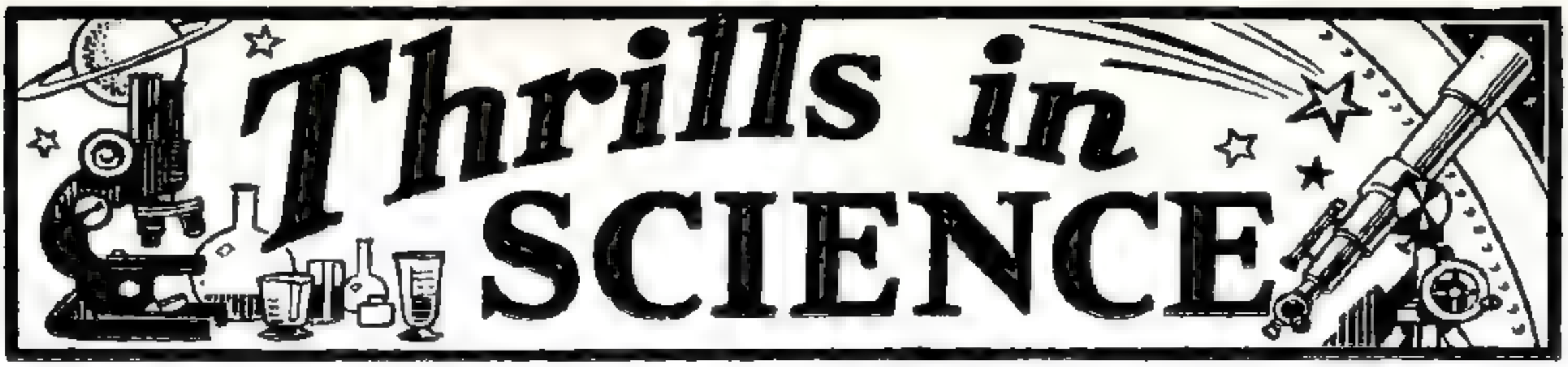


Thumbnail Sketches of Great Men and Achievements

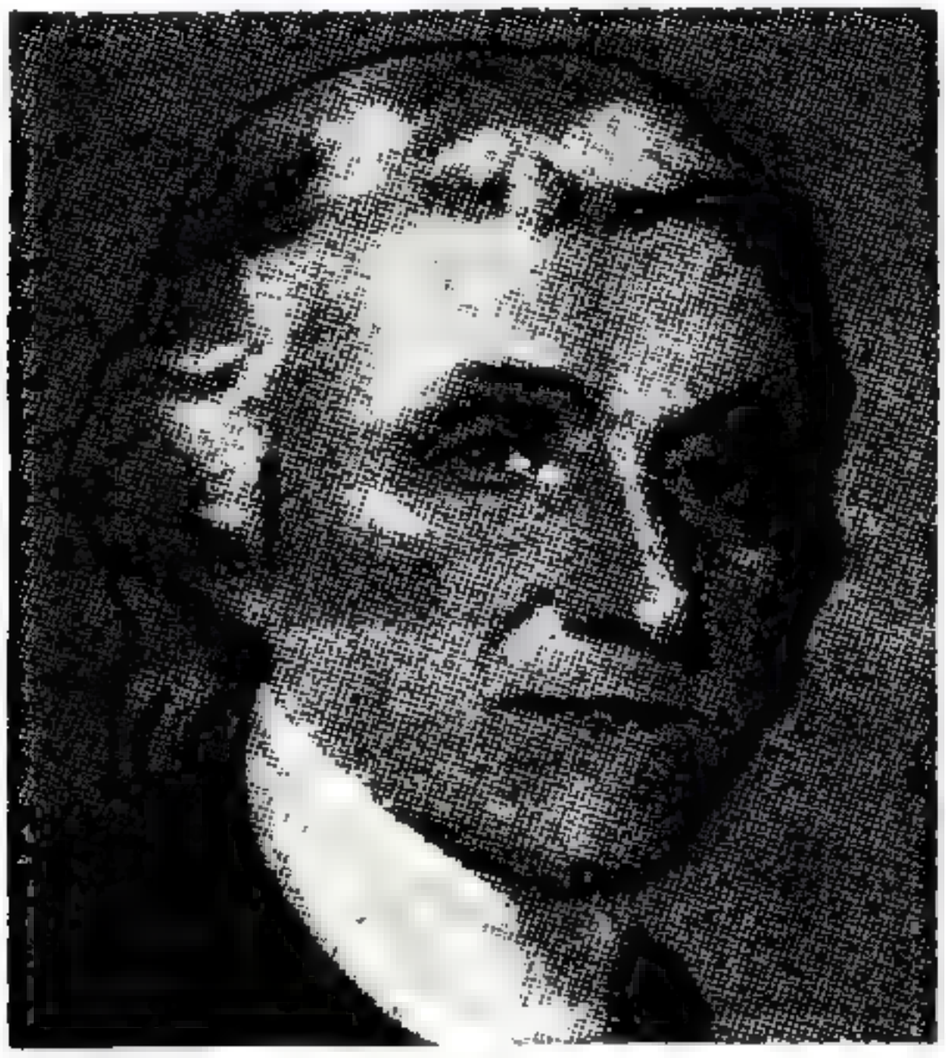
By MORT WEISINGER

THE LIFE-SECRET OF MICE AND MEN

TO quiet his pounding nerves, Joseph Priestley played the flute. The soft, piping notes of the instrument had the power to soothe his impatience, while waiting for his latest experiment to fulfill itself.

He sensed that he was at the breathless verge of a tremendous discovery. Two mice reposed separately in two jars inverted over water to seal them off from the outer air. The mice sniffed and wiggled but remained on their little floating platforms he had constructed. Priestley watched them narrowly, wondering if they would unravel a deep mystery for him.

The gaseous atmosphere in which one of the mice existed was simply air. Though Priestley did not know the word, in 1795, this mouse was his "control." The other creature, however, existed in a strange, unknown gas. Priestley had made this enigmatic gas by decomposing red mercury



Joseph Priestley

oxide with heat and collecting its vaporous by-product. He had tested the queer gas to find it remarkably active. It brightened the flame of a candle thrust into it. Glowing charcoal sparkled from its effect. And it made the glowing tip of thin iron wire actually burst into flame!

What startlingly active gas—originally extracted from the air through the mercury oxide phase—accounted for these incredible phenomena? And—the thought almost terrified him in its significance—what effect could the gas have on *life?*

His mice would tell him. And if the answer was what he thought it was, it would solve one of the most intriguing problems of mice and men—the secret of their common breathing processes! Of the fundamental of all life!

The tall, thin, blond-haired Englishman, once a champion of political liberty but now a liberator of human thought, played on. He did not know what tune he was playing on the flute. The notes came in accordance with his feelings. First slow, halting, as he told himself he was hoping too much. Then rapid, surging, as his thoughts soared. Finally they formed a cadence of steady, throbbing beats, in tune with his hammering pulses, as he saw one of the mice squirm fitfully. Still he played and watched, not daring to hope at what he saw.

The clock ticked on. Fifteen minutes passed.

Suddenly, as though he had been stung, Priestly flung the instrument aside and ran forward. He kneeled before one jar, with his sharp, eager face inches from the mouse therein. It was dying! Its lungs had consumed the air in its sealed prison and it could no longer find sustenance for its laboring lungs. But the *other* mouse — in the strange, new gas—lived on!

Priestley, tender-hearted, rescued the dying mouse before it suffocated. Then he took up a vigil beside the other jar. The second mouse lived on another fifteen minutes before it, too, started to choke and fall down, kicking feebly.

The pieces of the puzzle dove-tailed in his

mind, in a flash of keen insight. There existed in the air, hitherto unsuspected, a constituent gas that had the vital function of supporting life!

Priestley did not realize the full significance of his discovery—that from this fundamental fact would be built the entire structure of future chemistry. But he did know that he had solved a problem that had gnawed in his own mind for ten years.

Priestley picked up his flute again. Its trilling notes echoed the thrill in his heart. He had isolated the long-sought Gas of Life—oxygen!

FATE REVEALS THE MAGIC RAY

PROFESSOR WILHELM KONRAD ROENTGEN found himself very tired. He had so many classes, so many exam papers to check, of the students of Würzburg University. If only he had more time for research—more time to delve for the great secrets of science!

Tired as he was, he began puttering around his little laboratory, hardly knowing what he was doing. He snapped on the switch that sent 20,000 volts through a Crookes Tube. A simple apparatus it was—a sealed glass bulb with two electrodes leading into a vacuum of one-millionth of an atmosphere of pressure. It glowed with greenish phosphorescence.

Röntgen stared at it absently, little realizing that it held a cosmic secret in its radiant interior.

"Always it glows like swamp-fire," he mumbled aloud in the silence of the crowded little room. He pondered for a moment, tugging at his bushy gray beard, then hunched his stocky shoulders. He had no time to investigate the phenomenon. And it was probably unimportant anyway, *ja*.

Suddenly his eyes twinkled. He carefully locked the door and then took a strip of black paper—used for photographic experiments—and cut out a little mannikin. He held this in front of the phosphorescent tube so that the mannikin's shadow was thrown on the wall. The huge silhouette danced in lively tempo as Röntgen twiddled the black paper.

The scientist felt a little ashamed of himself for his impulsive act. Here he was, a fifty-year old man, a staid professor on top of it, cutting out paperdolls and casting shadows on a wall. Childish! He had much work to do, many little experiments to follow through that he had started. And those exam papers had to be marked. But he was so tired. . . .

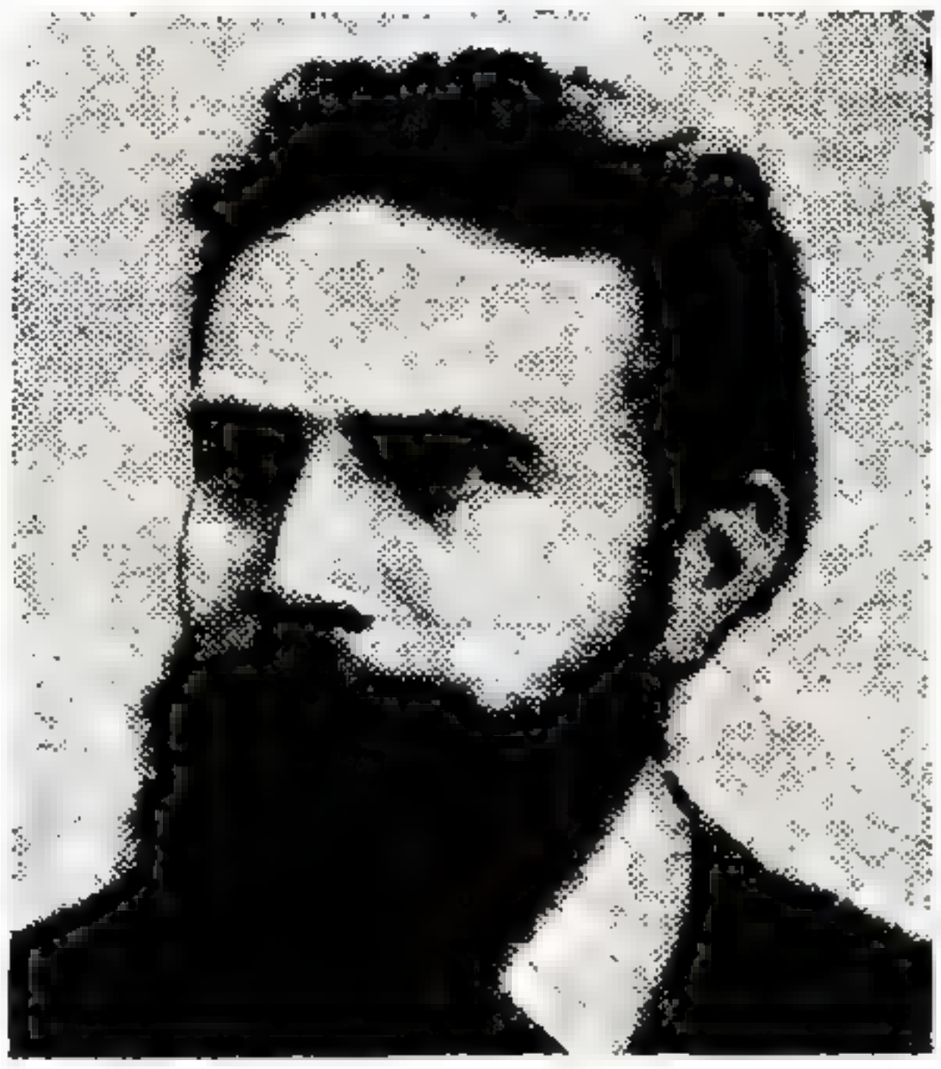
Quite suddenly, his sleepy eyes opened wide. Where did that strange glow come from, several feet from the Crookes Tube? Why, those crystals there, on the table, they glowed fiercely, like bits of diamond in the sunshine. But it was impossible! The crystals were lying completely in the *shadow* of the mannikin. No radiance from the tube struck them at all. This was some trick, *ja*?

Yet he had to make one conclusive test. He thereupon took a large sheet of the black paper and covered the Crookes Tube completely. Now no visible radiation at all came through the opaque barrier. He looked at the crystals again. . . .

"Himmel!" he gasped. "It is magic!"

For the crystals were shining like big fireflies!

Röntgen's weariness dropped away like a cloak. He began following up this incredible clue to some vital discovery. The crystals were barium platino-cyanide. He coated



Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen

a piece of cardboard with them and held this before the covered tube. The cardboard glowed vividly. Some invisible radiation, different from light and able to penetrate the black paper, stabbed from the tube. The crystals changed the unseen radiation to visible light. So much was obvious. What more did it mean?

The answer came unexpectedly. He noticed a peculiar shadow back of his thumb on the crystal screen. In every detail, it was the structure of his thumb's bones! And when he held his whole hand between the Crookes Tube and the screen, the flesh seemed stripped away!

The professor became a demon of activity. Tired? Not any more! He placed a key in a book, put a photographic plate behind it, and let the new X-rays—"X" for unknown

—impinge on the book's cover. Hours later he had photographic proof—a dim but definite picture of a key in a hazy background that was the paper of the book.

Röntgen sat down finally to catch his breath. He had discovered a giant marvel of science. He was a great scientist, *ja*.

But suddenly he bowed his head humbly. He knew within his heart that the whole thing had been accidental. Fate had picked him blindly.

Professor Röntgen smiled whimsically as he picked up the little black mannikin from the floor.

DR. PETTENKOFER'S STRANGE MEAL

IT was after dark. Old Professor Max Pettenkofer still labored behind his desk in the classroom of Munich University.

"The fools—the infernal, blasted fools!" he muttered, his eyes glowing fiercely. "Bah—they are so stupid!"

Old Pettenkofer had been studying the reports of the great bacteriologist, Robert Koch, in connection with the lethal cholera epidemics in India.

"Cholera never rises spontaneously," Koch had said. "No healthy man can ever be attacked by cholera unless he swallows the common microbe, and this germ can only develop from its like—it cannot be produced from any other thing, or out of nothing. And it is only in the intestine of man, or in highly polluted water like that of India that it can grow."

Old Professor Pettenkofer was the rabid chief of the circle of cynics who persisted in ignoring Koch's proofs of the relationship between germs and death. Germs? Microbes? They were sheer nonsense, the professor believed.

Pettenkofer opened the drawer of his

Dr. Robert Koch

desk, withdrew a sheet of stationery. He dipped his pen into an inkwell, and in a bold, flamboyant script began to scrawl:

"My dear Doctor Koch: Send me some of your so-called deadly cholera germs. If I can't prove them harmless, I'll eat a pound of arsenic oxide!"

Then Pettenkofer signed his name with a flourish, folded the note, and sent it off.

The great Koch sent Pettenkofer a sealed glass culture that contained a liquid mixture swarming with the microscopic carriers of death. There were enough of the invisible messengers of murder thriving in that culture to decimate the population of a city.

When the culture of deadly cholera germs arrived at the University, Pettenkofer sent for his colleagues and the medical journal writers. This was Pettenkofer's big dramatic moment in life, and like a masterful showman he intended to make the most of it.

He held the deadly culture in his hand, for all to see. There was a concerted gasp from his associates as he broke the seal. His voice husky with emotion, Pettenkofer addressed his group of non-microbe believers:

"The great Dr. Koch claims there are enough deadly cholera germs present in this mixture to wipe out an army. Now watch!"

Suddenly, with a swift movement, the foolhardy scientist swallowed the entire contents of the culture!

"Now let us see if I get cholera," he said scornfully, lighting his pipe and puffing away complacently.

Nobody knows what grim thoughts may have been harbored in Pettenkofer's brain as he downed his murderous appetizer. Maybe he was so confident that his own the[illegible] right, that cholera was caused by the predisposition of the individual, rather than by mythical microbes, that he was absolutely fearless about the consequences of his feat. Or perhaps there was just a little part of him that believed in Koch . . . and was afraid. At any rate, he smiled at Death.

Nothing ever happened to Pettenkofer, to the bafflement of medical science. For Koch was right, we know, and the failure of the mad Pettenkofer to come down with cholera remains to this day an enigma, without even the beginning of an explanation.

A few days after the incident, Pettenkofer wrote smartly to Koch:

"I have swallowed millions of your alleged fatal bacilli, and have not even had a cramp in my stomach!"

Who was it that said . . . "fools rush in where angels fear to tread"?

A COLUMBUS OF SPACE

IT was Sunday afternoon, November 24, 1639. In the small church of a little village on the outskirts of Liverpool, young Jeremiah Horrocks stepped falteringly to the pulpit. The male choir had just finished singing the last hymn, and the mellow tones of the old pump-organ were drifting away.

Jeremiah Horrocks surveyed the small audience of church-goers before him, but he did not see their faces. He spoke ardently of the words of God, but he did not hear them. For that afternoon Horrocks was thinking rather of the works of God . . . the Earth, the Sun, and the planets.

But of all the worlds in the Solar System, one alien planet, cloud-veiled Venus, hovered before Jeremiah Horrocks' eyes with the clarity of a blazing meteor plunging through sable darkness. For all night before and the following morning Jeremiah Horrocks had watched that planet until his eyes burned like fiery coals.

Jeremiah Horrocks was only twenty years old that afternoon as he stood in the pulpit, holding his congregation rapt with the glories of God. But the two hundred dollars salary he received each year for conducting the church services was not enough to bring him the glories of the Universe. Horrocks' telescope was only a cheap one, costing him sixty cents, the most he could afford.

A sixty-cent telescope, but Jeremiah Horrocks treasured it more than an astronomer today would value the 100-inch giant reflector at Mt. Wilson. Crude though the telescope was, almost an optical toy, it had enabled Horrocks to make calculations which predicted that there would be a transit of Venus across the Sun that very afternoon.

No astronomer in the world had ever yet observed a transit of Venus, the celestial phenomenon wherein the white little planet crossed the path of the blinding Sun, appeared directly in front of it, so that the white planet became a black disc by contrast.

Galileo had never witnessed it . . . he had too many other cosmic miracles to study. Keppler, Copernicus—they had never thought of it. Now, if Jeremiah Horrocks' calculations were accurate, he would be the first human being on Earth to witness this heavenly wonder.

Horrocks hastened through with his services that afternoon. If he were late . . . if he were to miss the spectacle . . . it would be years before he had a chance to see it again.

He hurried to his humble home that afternoon, his pulses racing madly in his strong, young body. He was but a boy, but he stood on the threshold of the frontier with the Men Who Mapped the Skies.

Once inside his house, the young astronomer entered the room that was both his observatory and sleeping quarters. The room was completely darkened, in preparation for the experiment. Before a small aperture by the window, stood his simple telescope. The Sun's glaring rays, pouring into its lens, emerged from the eye piece at its other end, casting a vivid image upon a white cloth that Horrocks had hung upon the wall.

He watched breathlessly. There was nothing on the white screen as yet except the steady white light of the Sun. What was the matter? The young astronomer was puzzled. Hadn't his mathematical calculations been accurate, would'nt Venus hurl itself across the surface of the Sun? Wouldn't—

Wait a minute . . . what was that? Were his weary eyes, tortured by hours of concentrated observation, deceiving him?

The planet Venus! There it was—a miniature black disc appearing just beyond the Sun's corona. Horrocks didn't breathe. An eternity later the black disc, rotating at about the speed of twenty miles a second, showed across the sun's chromosphere.

Jeremiah Horrocks kept his eyes glued to the white screen that afternoon, his face flushed, as he watched the planet Venus careen blithely in its orbit across the flaming surface of the Sun. It was the thrill of a lifetime.

For Horrocks, those moments *were* a lifetime. The young preacher-astronomer died two years later, at the early age of twenty-two. Sir John Herschel, the great astronomer of years to come, called Horrocks the "pride and boast of British astronomy." If he had lived, Horrocks might have become the greatest astronomer in the history of the world.

But Horrocks died happily. He had lived to chart the path of Venus across the Sun —and had been fortunately destined to see visual proof of his remarkable calculations.

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More

THRILLS IN SCIENCE

—in the next issue of STARTLING STORIES

SCIENCE ?! Question ?? BOX

ABSOLUTE ZERO

Editor, SCIENCE QUESTION BOX:

If a body is supplied with heat its temperature rises. Starting with any temperature one can perfectly well imagine a higher temperature, at which the body contains more heat. Is it also possible to imagine a temperature lower than any initial one? Or is there a degree of cold beyond which it is impossible to take still more heat from the body?—L. E., Princeton, New Jersey.

The answer to your question was already known in the nineteenth century: There does exist a lowest temperature, known as absolute zero. By the ordinary Fahrenheit scale this lowest temperature is about 459.8° below zero.

Once such a concept was established, scientists realized the importance of investigating the field of low temperatures. Experimental physicists began a long race to a new goal: the temperature of absolute zero. Records were made and broken. Lower and lower temperatures were reached. A new region of investigation was conquered, but by no means fully exhausted. Scattered throughout the civilized world today are many low-temperature laboratories in which scientists are still working toward the same goal.

Scientists have reached temperatures differing from that of absolute zero by something like a hundredth of a degree. It would perhaps seem that the goal is almost reached. A hundredth of a degree is not very much. But scientists realize that the problem is far from completion. Each small step further is more difficult than the previous one. And perhaps more important, since each step may reveal aspects of the structure of matter in a region of great interest from the point of view of modern physics.

An example will show the difficulties connected with the investigation. Let us imagine that we are trying to approach a great wall in some fantastic world. Strange things happen: as we come nearer the wall an uncanny metamorphosis takes place. All our dimensions, and consequently the length of our steps, become smaller and smaller. Our dimensions and our steps diminish at such a rate that they approach zero as our distance from the wall approaches zero.

In this fantastic world we are bound to suffer disappointment. At first the wall seemed only a finite distance away, but we can begin to understand that we can never approach only by ever-diminishing steps. Something like this happens in the march of science toward absolute zero. To go a thousandth of a degree lower is an incomparably greater task now than it was to make the same step at a temperature only a few degrees higher.
—Ed.

HOW WELL DO ANIMALS SEE?

Editor, SCIENCE QUESTION BOX:

Is there any way known to science which enables man to test the vision of animals? If so, which animals see best?—J. R., Stanford, Conn.

Dr. John Warkentin of the University of Rochester recently devised a plan by which even the most bored and stolid creatures will give information as to how well they can see. He places an animal at the bottom of a standing cylinder, lighted from above, large enough to contain the animal without crowding.

On the walls of the cylinder are vertical stripes of black and white. The largest of these stripes is five inches across, the smaller ones only one-sixteenth of an inch across.

All the animal can see, when inside the cylinder, is the striped wall and its own body. The wall is slowly turned, and if the animal can really see the stripes, even the most sluggish eyes or head turn and follow the movement. Smaller and smaller stripes are used, until a stripe-width is reached to which the animal will not respond. This—it seems fair to assume—is the limit of the keenness of that creature's vision.

For a few animals that easily follow the 1/16-inch stripes with their eyes, even narrower threads are employed, the very finest being no more than 1/1000 inch in diameter. These tests, of course, do not measure the animal's power to focus its vision on things far or near. White rats and white mice have almost the poorest vision of any creature that can really see. Gila monsters of the Arizona desert also have vision that grades almost down to zero.

Although some might assume that larger eyes give better sight, the tests on frogs and toads revealed poor vision. Alligators do not see well, either, yet most of the other reptiles have very good eyes. All types of snakes are keen-eyed except when they are shedding their skins, of which the cornea, or eye-cover, is a part. Turtles' vision is really good, even though their eyes are but beads.

As expected, most creatures of the forests and the fields have very good eyesight. Those creatures that must walk at night, and those that fly high above the ground, have been given the keen vision they need, and the cats and birds are characteristically clear-eyed and able to see the fine lines in the turning cylinder. In all tests of similar creatures, the wild ones could see better than the tame ones.—Ed.

In this department the editors of STARTLING STORIES will endeavor to answer your questions on modern scientific facts. Please do not submit more than three questions in your letter. As many questions as possible will be answered here, but the editors cannot undertake any personal correspondence. Naturally, questions of general interest will be given the preference Address your questions to SCIENCE QUESTION BOX, STARTLING STORIES, 22 West 48th Street, New York City.

THE FATE OF THE EARTH

Editor, SCIENCE QUESTION BOX:

In the annual report of the Smithsonian Institution, I noticed that Professor Henry Norris Russell, of Princeton University, claims that death by rusting, rather than by freezing when the sun goes out, may possibly be the eventual fate of the Earth. Can you clarify this statement?—E. O. B., Berkeley, Calif.

Oxygen, as everybody now knows, is the real essence of the breath of life. If it were to be wholly removed from the atmosphere of this planet, we should all perish—bird and man, toadstool and tree. Some rocks contain oxygen, locked up in chemical combination. Sometimes this combination can be cracked, as by volcanic action. Then the oxygen is turned loose, largely as carbon dioxide, which is eagerly seized upon by plants, which extract the carbon for food manufacture, and return half of the oxygen free. Thus the atmosphere is replenished.

But there are other rocks, very abundant, too, containing iron in the partly oxidized "ferrous" form. This ferrous oxide is thirsty for more oxygen, to complete its transformation into the "ferric" form. Ferric oxide is most familiar to us as common rust, but it is also responsible for most of the common red rocks and soils.

Evidently Professor Russell suggests that eventually the ferrous minerals will absorb all the oxygen in the air, or yet to be released into the air, locking it up in ferric minerals. The Earth will then be without the oxygen-breathing life as we know it. This stage may perhaps already exist on Mars, the rust-red planet But it will take more than a billion years to occur here on Earth.—Ed.

"THERBLIGS"

Editor, SCIENCE QUESTION BOX:

What in the world is a "therblig"? Please explain this term to me—in simple language.—D. W., Elida, New Mexico.

If you pick up a pen, write on a piece of paper and lay the pen down again you are using nine therbligs. The little known term, therblig, was one of the major topics of discussion at one of the sessions of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers recently.

A therblig, explained Prof. Ralph M. Barnes of the University of Iowa, is a fundamental hand motion used in performing different kinds of work. There are 18 basic hand motions out of which all manual motions can be fashioned and described.

By motion picture studies of workers, ways to cut waste hand motion in many industrial operations are being learned so that the workers can turn out more work with less energy and effort.

Here is Prof. Barnes' listing of the steps in writing and their therblig equivalents in parentheses:

1. reach for pen (transport empty)
2. grasp pen (grasp)
3. carry pen to paper (transport loaded)
4. position pen for writing (position)
5. write (use)
6. return pen to holder (transport loaded)
7. insert pen in holder (pre-position)
8. let go pen (release)
9. move hand to paper (transport empty)

By analysis of motion studies it is often possible to save materials as well as time. Prof. Barnes cited a case of revising methods of painting refrigerators in which there was a reduction in time of 50.6 per cent, a reduction in rejections of 60 per cent, direct labor savings of $3,750 a year

Of the 18 therbligs, grasp is one of the commonest and one of the most time-consuming. Wherever possible, in inspections, scientists try to remove the need for picking up the article in question.—Ed.

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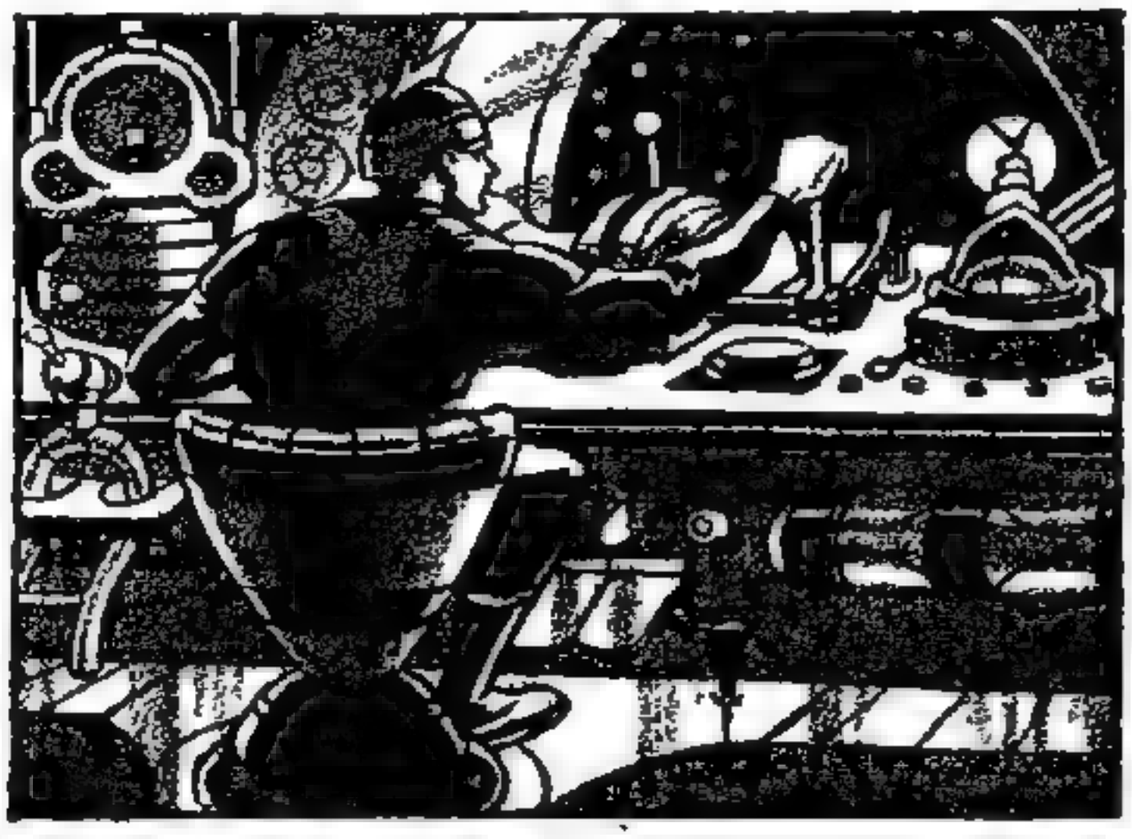

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SCIENCE ISLAND

A Cold-Blooded Scientific Napoleon with the Brain of a Genius and a Body of Metal Threatens to Dominate Mankind!

With a desperate wrench Mason swung the door open!

By EANDO BINDER

Author of "Life Eternal," "A Comet Passes," etc.

BATHED in the soft glow of a tropic moon, the island looked peaceful and quiet to Don Mason. There was certainly no inkling in his mind of the incredible menace lurking beneath its slumbering surface.

He was standing beside Helen Montry at the rail of her uncle's yacht, drinking in the cool night breezes. It had been a long, hot cruise of three thousand miles from San Francisco, with a single stop at Honolulu.

Helen Montry stiffened suddenly and leaned forward over the rail, straining her eyes toward shore.

"Look, Don," she said pointing. "Isn't that some sort of glow at the center of the island, behind the cliff? This island is supposed to be uninhabited, yet it looks like a light, or group of lights."

"Probably just the moon's reflection on smooth rock formations," Don Mason returned casually. He slipped an arm around the girl. "There is a much lovelier reflection in your eyes," he added softly.

Helen Montry squeezed his arm but continued to stare at the island bulking mysteriously against the backdrop of star-stippled sky.

"I've noticed that glow, too," another voice broke in behind them. "Very odd—"

They started. Dr. Raoul Montry, Helen's uncle, had approached si-

lently. Don Mason straightened, though he was off duty and out of uniform, and saluted.

The luxury of a comfortable inheritance at birth had not prevented Raoul Montry from becoming a hard-working scientist, and his private researches in biology had gained him great professional distinction.

His deep-set eyes now held a queer look of anticipation.

"Perhaps *this* is the place!" he murmured. He turned to the young first mate. "I've informed the captain that you'll take me ashore in the launch, first thing in the morning."

"Aye, aye, sir!" said Mason crisply. He hesitated, then went on. "But may I ask, sir, what you expect to find on a deserted island halfway between the Philippines and Hawaii?"

HE was wondering, too, why they had practically scoured this region of the Pacific near the Phoenix Islands. They had stopped at a half dozen bits of land, as though on an intensive search for something of which only Dr. Montry was aware. Mason hardly expected an illuminative answer. Men of the crew were not supposed to ask the yacht's owner his business.

But Dr. Montry surprised him.

"I think I'll tell you, Mason," he said slowly. "You're an intelligent young man, and I like you. I think Helen agrees with me on that." He smiled at the girl's quick blush and went on with a serious note in his voice.

"I'm looking for Dr. Arndt Knurd, formerly my collaborator in biological research. He vanished five years ago from our laboratory, taking with him all our notes and formulae on a new discovery. And, incidentally, a hundred thousand dollars of my money. I've had private investigators trying to pick up his trail since the disappearance. Just last month they traced him. Or rather, got wind of huge shipments of apparatus sent from Melbourne to some unnamed island in the Phoenix group. That's why we're here; to find which island —and Dr. Knurd."

"But why, sir, after five years?" Mason asked. He knew it wasn't the money. "That discovery—it was an important one?"

The scientist nodded.

"Vital," he said. "We developed a method of transplanting living brains —we used dogs—into an artificial medium of life, disconnected entirely from the rest of the body. We made electrically-motivated robot bodies, with living canine brains operating them almost as deftly as their natural bodies. We had devised a way of transmitting nerve-impulses along wires."

Mason felt the girl shudder against him. He knew his skin was crawling a little too at the rather gruesome account.

"And you think," he said, "that Dr. Knurd came to this island, or some island, to—well, to do what?"

"That's what I wonder!" Dr. Montry's kindly eyes looked deeply worried. "My agents also found out that he had contacted four other scientists. They have disappeared from public life. Professor Harkman, the famous metallurgist, was one. Dr. Yorsky, well-known Russian surgeon, another. And Walsh and Hapgood, engineer and physicist respectively. For five years these scientific minds have been together, on some island. What does it mean? Dr. Knurd himself is the—well, unscrupulous sort. He may—"

A sharp intake of breath from Helen interrupted.

"What's that?" Her trembling arm pointed toward the sheer cliff back of the island's broad beach. "Something is moving there—"

The men stared. A formless shadow, pierced by what seemed to be greenly gleaming eyes, moved across the cliff's unlighted background. They could not make out its shape or size. The glow of the mysterious eyes deepened and its twin beams seemed to stab out toward them and focus on the boat.

Don Mason sensed danger. A strange feeling of lassitude had stolen through his body. In a flash he knew that the twin-beam was bringing them

paralysis! But even as his hand darted for the automatic in his pocket, he felt his fingers go limp.

Helen gave a choked scream and folded up on the deck floor. Dr. Montry, panting, was trying to drag himself along the rail with muscles that had turned to water. Hoarse shouts came from below, from the crew's quarters.

Cursing and trying to fight the gripping paralysis, Mason felt his legs turn to rubber. The deck came up into his face, like a club. He did not feel the blow. His whole body was numb. And the numbness was creeping insidiously into his brain.

He made one last effort, with a groan, and then gave up as a blot of inkiness crushed his mind. . . .

Don Mason lay still for a while when he came back to dreamy consciousness. He still felt numb, and wasn't quite sure that he was wide awake yet. He was even more uncertain when he moved his eyes and started to look around.

His first blurred glance left him with a sinking sensation of unnatural smallness which Mason vaguely attributed to the dizzy reaction of consciousness. He closed his eyes for a moment and then cautiously opened them again. His eyes focused on a shelf diagonally across from where he lay, a shelf which held laboratory flasks that appeared to be several feet high!

Mason blinked. Were his eyes deceiving him? Those flasks shouldn't normally be more than about a half a foot in size.

His eyes moved slightly downward, and they grew wide with astonishment as they fastened on an instrument. The instrument was simply and unmistakably a microscope—but a microscope which appeared to be as large as himself!

Still feeling hazy and numb, Mason started to think, slowly and ponderously. Something was obviously wrong, totally illogical. It was crazy. A microscope was a microscope and should be only a foot or so long. Yet, unless his eyes were deceiving him, here was a microscope that appeared to be as large as himself. Ah, that was it! *Appeared* to be. Then his eyes *were* deceiving him! But what was causing the illusion?

Suddenly and startlingly, his brain flashed to full consciousness. Relativity! Of course! With a terrified feeling of helplessness, Mason realized that the reason the microscope was so large was because *he* was somehow so small! The microscope was as large as he was, all right, he told himself wryly—but *he* was only a foot high!

Mason forced himself to look further, and everything he saw seemed to verify his conclusions. He appeared to be in a gigantic chamber of rock without windows. He was lying on the cold stone floor, with Helen beside him. The girl, too, he observed, was his subnormal size. Bright electric lights unnaturally far ahead shone down, revealing a long huge table on which lay various implements of gross size, among them the microscope. It was a laboratory, Mason realized, a normal laboratory with everything in it looking colossal to his reduced self.

His gaze turned further, toward the end of the great table, and what he saw there made him draw his breath in sharply. Two figures were standing near the table—two monstrous-looking forms of copper-red metal!

Robots! Mechanized travesties of the human shape, with elongated cylindrical heads and bodies, jointed legs and arms. Both of them towered incredibly high from Mason's supine view.

Robots and a laboratory! The mystery of it brought a sharp unease, almost a hysterical terror, to Mason's dizzied mind. It was obviously some of Dr. Knurd's work, from what Dr. Montry had told him about Knurd. The scientist had stolen the secret of robot brain-control. He had come to this remote island, evidently to apply the method to human-sized robots.

Mason had already taken it as a matter of course that the two robots he saw were controlled by human brains. There was no other possibility. His mind raced on, almost without his volition. What was Knurd's purpose

behind such a coldly scientific act? What was his reason for reducing his captives—or at least Mason himself and Helen so far—to such insignificant proportions? Just *how* he had accomplished it was relatively unimportant.

THERE had been deep rumbling sounds in Mason's ears since he had awakened. He listened closely now, realizing they were the mechanical voices of the robot-men.

"I think you are close to success, Professor Harkman," boomed one robot's voice. He straightened up from the instrument over which he had been bending. "Those metallo-organisms you've created are unquestionably alive."

Don Mason listened with a beating heart. Professor Harkman, one of the four Dr. Montry had mentioned! Harkman was, or had been, the world's foremost metallurgist. He had long been an advocate of the theory of metallic life. How did he and this discovery fit into the puzzle of this underground cavern of science?

"Yes, Dr. Knurd," replied the other robot. "They are alive."

Mason caught his breath. So the first robot was the thieving Dr. Knurd himself! He had had himself made into a robot. His own scheming, clever brain lay within the metal body, controlling it as though it were his nature-given body. That made the whole situation still more perplexing and Mason wondered just how astounding the answer to it all was.

He listened further, not making the slightest move as yet.

The second robot, whose controlling brain had been that of Professor Harkman, continued.

"Yes, alive. Micro-organisms composed mainly of iron! As far back as 1927, Dr. Molisha of Japan described the 'toxothrix,' a germ, found in air, whose weight was fifty percent iron. Before that, only the red corpuscles of animal blood were known to carry iron. Stanford University confirmed Molisha's report in 1928. I was one of the men who followed his interesting research. I went further. I thought of mutating the toxothrix into a virulent metal-germ. I've succeeded here! This is a great thrill to me—"

"Yes, yes," cut in Dr. Knurd. His uninflected robot-voice could not express impatience, but it was implied. "Go on with your work, Professor. The germs must breed faster—as fast as pneumococci, for instance. When you produce that germ-culture, we will have the great force with which to conquer the world! Then, as practically eternal metal supermen, we will rule mankind for ages!"

Mason's brain reeled a little. Incredible as it sounded, that was the aim Dr. Knurd had had in mind with his theft of the robot secret. Rule of mankind! The man was a monomaniac—a cold-blodded, scientific Napoleon.

The robot-form of the metallurgist hesitated, with a stoppered culture tube in its hand.

"It may be dangerous to go on," he said warningly. "If it multiplies as fast as most organic germs, no metal it 'diseased' could stand up against it. It would eat into the strongest, toughest steel. If it were dispersed throughout the world, in a few months all metals would rot to powder and collapse. And don't forget, Dr. Knurd, *we* are made of metal!"

"Don't worry about such details," retorted the other robot. "I'm a biologist. I'll know how to handle the germs. I'll find a way to send them into opposing armies without danger to ourselves. Think of it, Professor, a bomb bursting in their midst. A cloud of germs dispelling through their air. All their metallic implements of warfare turning to 'diseased' dust as the metal-germs voraciously attack all metals within reach. Their cannon crumpling and their aircraft rising a few feet, then diving earthward like broken toys!"

Don Mason, hearing this prophetic recital, shuddered to the core of his being. Had the brain of Dr. Knurd, divorced from its true body, also renounced all claim to human feeling?

The robot-master's voice droned on.

"Those cannon could defeat us, you know. And those stinging aircraft

(Continued on page 119)

CONGRATULATIONS
By ARTHUR K. BARNES

Word has just reached me anent the companion magazine to THRILLING WONDER STORIES. Congratulations—and here's wishing STARTLING STORIES a super-success in the science fiction world.

I think that your policy of running long complete novels is an excellent one. At last we authors will have a chance to get a load of wordage—plus well-complicated plots—off our chest.

Henry Kuttner and I have plans for a long novel concerning the adventures of Tony Quade in his efforts to star Gerry Carlyle in an interplanetary picture for Nine Planet Films, Inc. Would the readers go for such a dish?—Glendale, Calif.

(What do you say, readers? Would you care to see a full-length novel involving the Tony (Kuttner) Quade and Gerry (Barnes) Carlyle feud? Postcard us your comments.—Ed.)

BOOSTS BOOKLENGTHS
By EDMOND HAMILTON

Good luck to the staff of STARTLING STORIES with their new science fiction venture. The idea of publishing a complete novel in every issue is a swell one, and I am glad to hear that the magazine will come out bi-monthly instead of quarterly.

I've got some ideas in mind for what I think would make a top-notch science fiction novel. One of these days, when I get the time to write it, I'll send it along. In the meanwhile, best wishes.—New Castle, Penna.

NIX ON SERIALS
By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

STARTLING STORIES is the answer to a science fiction serialist's prayers. Every pseudo-scientific novel I have ever written has been published in serial form. At last I've found a science fiction magazine that won't split up stories, regardless of the continuity.

So here's hoping that I become one of your future contributors.—N. Y. C., N. Y.

THE ETHER VIBRATES—with the letters sent in by loyal followers of science fiction. Add your voice! This department is a public forum devoted to your opinions, suggestions and comments—and we're anxious to hear from you. Remember, this is YOUR magazine and is planned to fulfill all your requirements. Let us know which stories and departments you like—and which fail to click with you. A knock's as welcome as a boost—speak right up and we'll print as many of your letters as possible. We cannot undertake to enter into private correspondence. Address THE ETHER VIBRATES, STARTLING STORIES, 22 West 48th St., New York, N. Y.

FEATURES PERFECT
By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

The Stanley G. Weinbaum novel, THE BLACK FLAME, should get STARTLING STORIES off to a swell start. Thanks for the preview news regarding the magazine . . . your scheduled list of science features sound perfect, particularly the Jack Binder strip, THEY CHANGED THE WORLD.

And I bet STARTLING STORIES changes the science-fiction world.—Scotch Plains, N. J.

VIA TWIN TALK
By EANDO BINDER (Earl & Otto)

The new STARTLING STORIES should prove a success. You folks have had plenty of time to plan the magazine, and if the first issue isn't tops, after what I've heard about it, we guys will stop writing science fiction.

And thanks for the privilege of being represented in the first number.—New York City, New York.

FAN AND AUTHOR
By ARTHUR J. BURKS

As a science fiction fan and author, let me express my best wishes for the new STARTLING STORIES. I was gratified to learn about the magazine, and I am certain that the magazine will prove a worthy contemporary of THRILLING WONDER STORIES.—New York City, New York.

QUINTUPLETS
By I. ASIMOV

There are five people in my family, and we all want a new scientifiction magazine.—174 Windsor Pl., Brooklyn, New York.

PENTON & BLAKE
By JOHN GIUNTA

I am so enthusiastic about publishing a companion magazine to THRILLING WONDER STORIES that I would be willing to support it at any cost. I think it would be swel-elegant.

I'd give a lot to see Penton and Blake in

(Continued on page 128)

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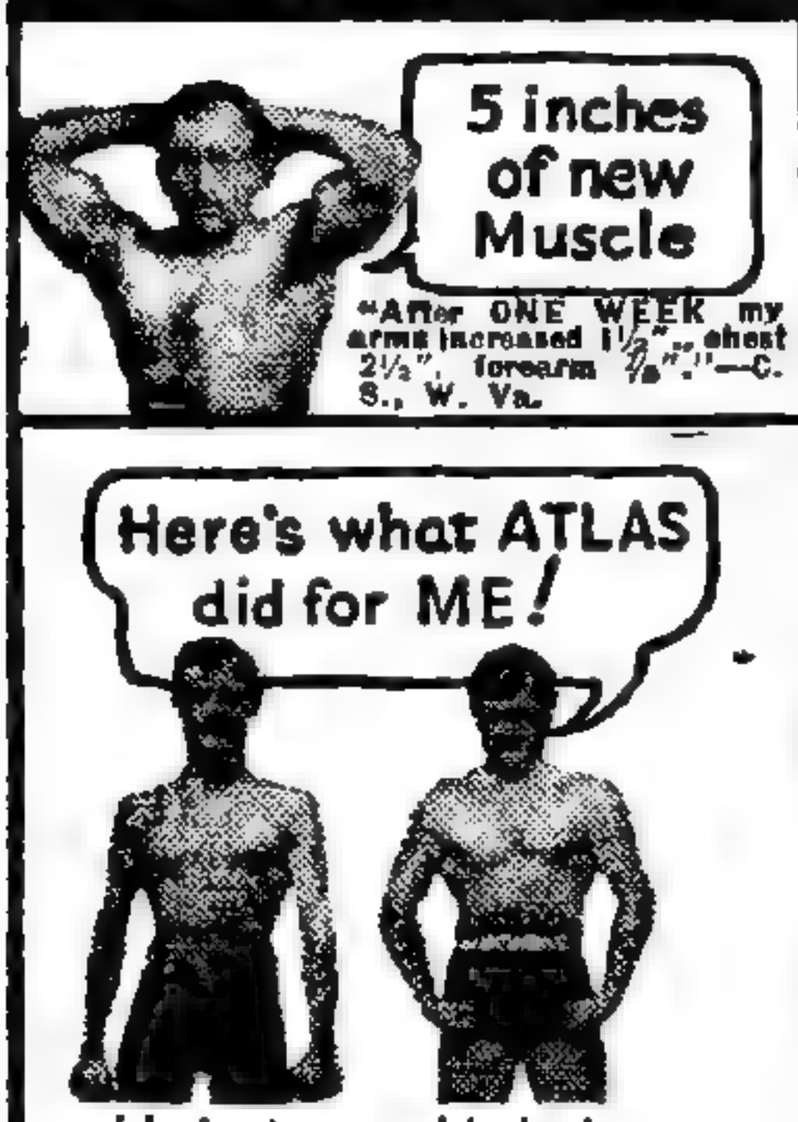
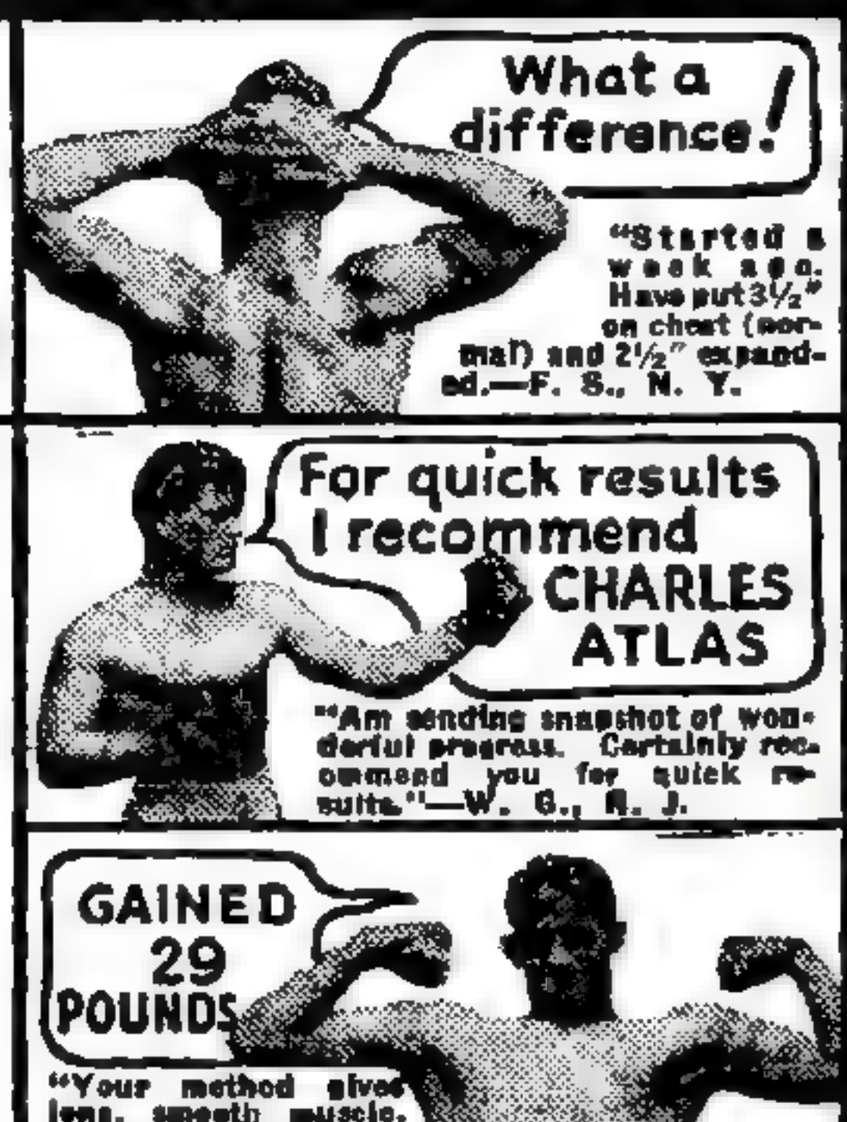


"After ONE WEEK my arms increased 1½", chest 2½", forearm ⅞".!"—C. S., W. Va.



"Started a week ago. Have put 3½" on chest (normal) and 2½" expanded.—F. S., N. Y.

"Am sending snapshot of wonderful progress. Certainly recommend you for quick results."—W. G., N. J.

"Your method gives long, smooth muscle. When I started weighed only 141. Now weigh 170."—T. K., N. Y.

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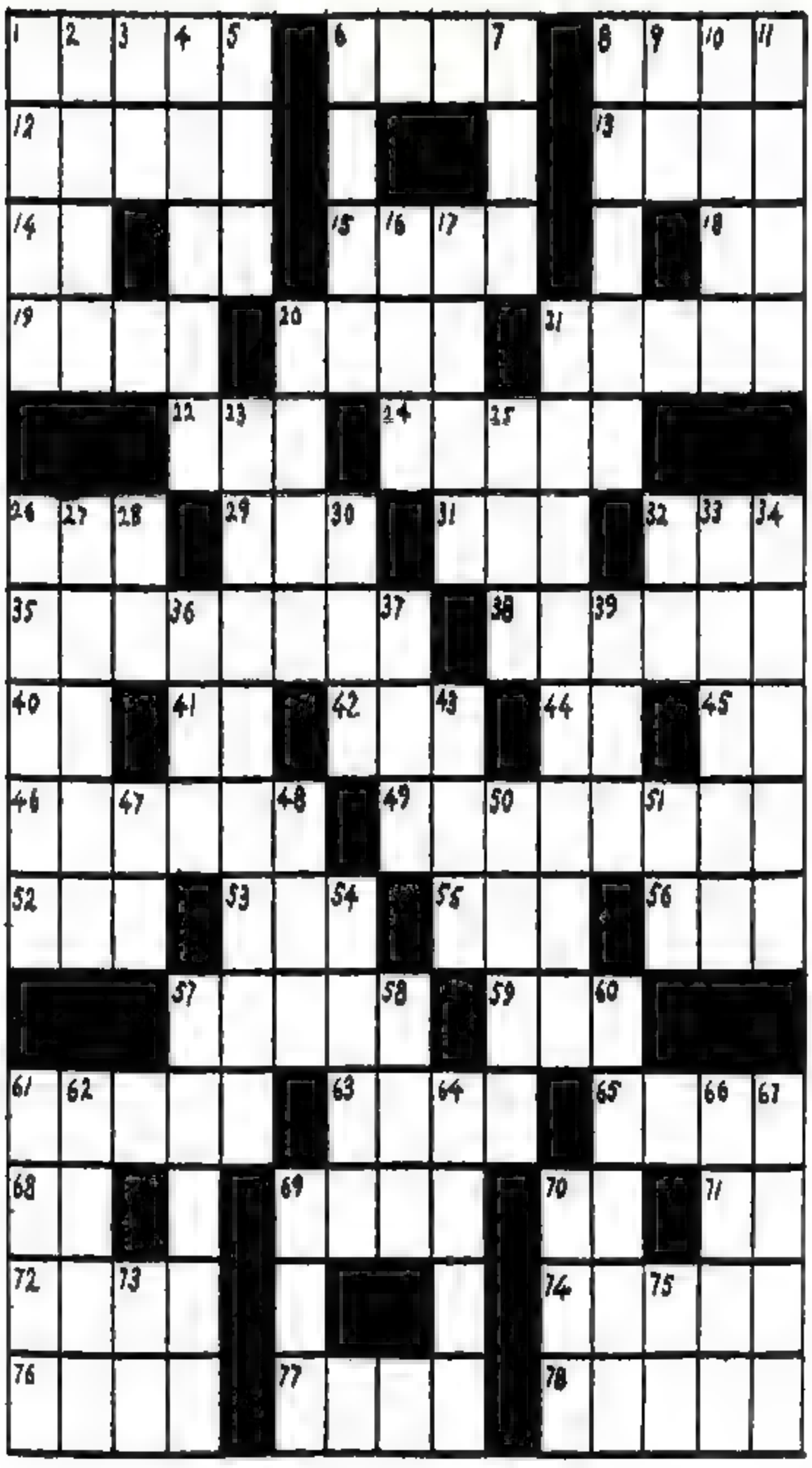
SCIENTIFIC CROSSWORD PUZZLE



HORIZONTAL

1—Positive terminal
6—Unit of electrical power
8—Term in trigonometry
12—Residue from distillation of turpentine
13—Acorn end-product
14—First two letters of famous inventor's name
14a—First and last letters of word meaning "vapor"
15—Electrical term
18—Suffix in chemistry denoting alcohols
19—Prefix "parent"
20—Prefix "fire"
21—Organic tubes
22—Article
24—Unit of potential energy
26—Unit of measure—2" inches
29—Long units of time (abb.)
31—An age
32—Darwin's pet
35—Element of alkali group
36—Dark volcanic rock
40—Liquor
41—Symbol for element of calcium group
42—Extinct flightless bird of New Zealand
44—Court official (abb.)
45—Exclamation
46—Father of atomic theory
49—Element used in type
52—Unit of work
53—Prefix—pertaining to earth
55—Pronoun
56—Term in colloidal chemistry
57—Prefix—opposite reverse
58—Printer's measure (plural)
61—Father of modern science methods
63—Parts of circle
65—Prefix—pertaining to distance
68—Suffix for alcohols
69—Napoleon's exile
70—Satellite of largest planet
71—Four
72—Genus of man
74—Matrix of universe
76—In physics, a condition of bodies
77—Entomologist's prey
78—That which measure

VERTICAL

1—Greek name for minor planet
2—Point where orbit of planet intersects ecliptic
3—Bone
4—Being
5—Printer's measure (pl.)
6—Indulant
7—Powerful explosive
8—Useful alloy
9—Symbol for element of the platinum triad
10—One of the noble gases
11—Elongated fish (plural)
16—Native metal
17—Space between eye and bill in birds (zool.)
20—Prefix—around or about
21—Element of tantalum group with five oxides
23—The ninth most abundant element in earth's total composition
25—A lump
26—To eat away (geol.)
27—Pertaining to earth's satellite
28—Unit of weight (abb.)
30—Total
32—First combination of letters in dictionary after "a"
33—An area determined by two crossing lines (geom.)
34—Combining radical of alcohol (chem.)
36—Suffix—one who practices in any given field
37—Same as 42 across
39—First three letters of element of rare earth group
43—Some
47—Big (abb.)
48—Webwork
50—Digits
51—Good name for Stone Age Man (but not "Ab")
54—Via speech
57—Servant of man
58—Heavenly body (poetic)
60—Excavation with steps (mining)
61—Author of electron-orbit theory
62—Fragrant spice
64—Eccentric wheel device (pl.)
66—Human parasite (pl.)
67—In all eternity
68—Flow back
70—Suffix—doctrine or creed
73—Authors' product (abb.)
75—Equals "V" (physics)

(The solution is on Page 129—if you MUST look!)

SCIENCE ISLAND

(Continued from page 115)

with their powerful guns, if we were so rash as to attack unprepared. All mankind will unite against us. They have great armies and tremendous combined forces. The paralysis-ray that Walsh and Hapgood developed is useless except at short range. Also their heat-beam. Without your metal-germ culture, we would not be able to defeat mankind, in the long run. On with your work, Professor."

HARKMAN'S jointed arm clinked against his cylindrical head in a salute. Then he left, through a door that seemed like the opening of half the wall, to Don Mason. The robot of Dr. Knurd bent over charts on the table.

Mason tried to clarify his thoughts in the silence. It was starkly simple, though almost unbelievable. Dr. Knurd and his group were out to con-

(Continued on page 120)

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(Continued from page 119)

quer humanity, in the shortest possible time. They had not only endurable metal bodies and two powerful weapons, but would soon have the Jovian offensive force of the metallic germ-culture.

The door opened again and another coppery-red robot stalked in, saluting Knurd. Following was a third robot, which came up with slow, almost faltering steps.

"Here is the new menial," announced the first robot.

"Oh, yes," grated Knurd's microphonic voice. "You have worked fast, Yorsky. Good."

The famous Russian surgeon, Dr. Yorsky—the third of Knurd's clique of five great minds! Mason grew bitter at the thought of such sparkling intellects pooling their genius in this unworthy cause.

The gleaming lenses of Knurd's robot-body turned to survey the third robot.

"Can you hear me, Dr. Montry?" Knurd asked.

"Yes, I hear you," returned the other robot in a hoarse mutter, as though unused to its new organs of metal.

Blood ran down Don Mason's lips as he bit them to keep from crying aloud. *Dr. Montry!* But he was no longer the human Dr. Montry. His brain had been transplanted into a robot body! This man who had so lately been a living, breathing being at his side, was now another of the inhuman monsters of metal. Mason felt as if all the universe had turned upside down.

Then he began to wonder how long he had been unconscious, if the operation had been performed in the meantime. For days? Or more likely the transplanting process had been shortened to a few hours by Yorsky's technique. In Russia, he had performed brain operations in half the time any other surgeon could. Mason turned his attention back to the robots.

"You hear me," continued Knurd, "and you will always obey me! I am the robot-master. You have been made a menial-robot, Dr. Montry, since I know you would never willingly serve

me. I hated to have it done, since you have a wonderful mind. Your brain has been reduced, in capacity. It is a delicate operation that the skillful Dr. Yorsky performs so well. One little cerebral nerve twisted aside and the entire prefrontal cortex is short-circuited. You have no voluntary powers—only the ability to obey orders. The occupants of three other ships that foundered here—under the influence of our paralysis-ray—have been made menial-robots also. Only the original five of us are master-robots. We will rule the world, when the time comes!"

Knurd went on, tauntingly.

"You have had a great part in this venture, Dr. Montry, though unwittingly. Our first discovery—of a solution in which the naked brain could live and transmit nerve-impulses—was the start of it all. I thought of a robot-race right away. Why have ailing, mortal bodies when you could have immortal metal ones? I contacted my four famous colleagues and they finally agreed. We pooled resources, came to this island, and carried out our plans.

"We became robots. We had perfected the robot mechanism elaborately. Powerful batteries supply power. We have far more strength and powers at the disposal of our controlling brains than we had with our normal bodies. We found our mental processes working better, too, unhindered by biological vagaries. We developed the paralysis-ray, the heat-beam, the brain-reducing method for menials, and a metallic germ-culture which will defeat mankind's armies. We will have complete control, for ages!"

DR. MONTRY made no denunciation. Don Mason realized he couldn't. His brain had been reduced and lacked voluntary powers. Dr. Montry could hear and understand, but he couldn't denounce or defy. He could only obey, as a virtual slave. It was a horrible fate that Mason realized might soon be his and Helen's. Was this why they had first been reduced in size?

(Continued on page 122)

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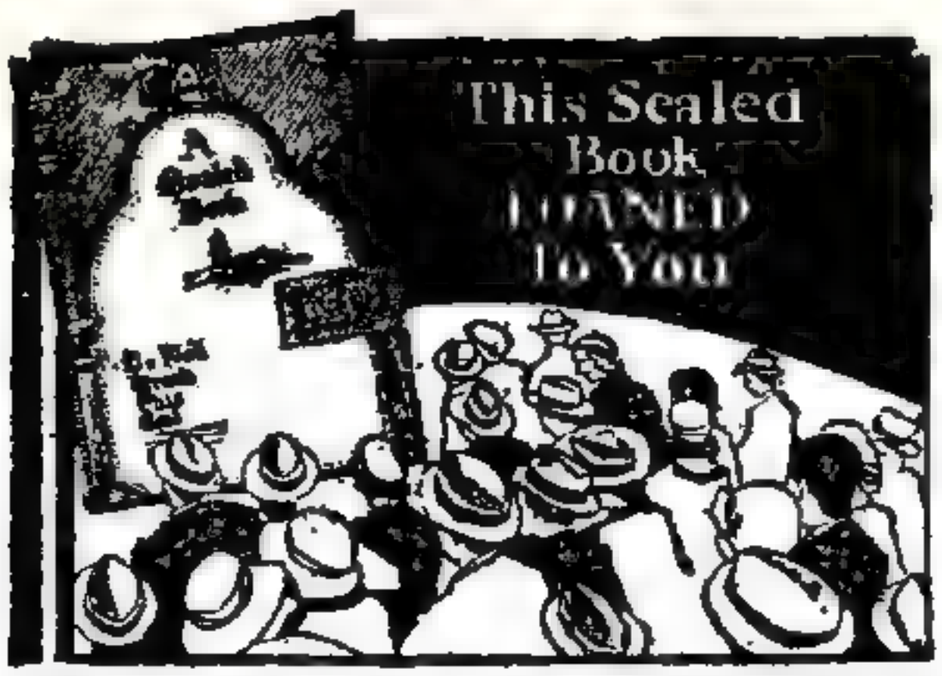

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(Continued from page 121)

"You may go, Dr. Montry," commanded Knurd. "Go to Harkman's laboratory and help him for the present."

The robot of Dr. Montry left without a word.

Knurd spoke to Yorsky. "Make the members of the yacht's crew into menials. We can use them."

"How about those two?" Yorsky pointed to Mason and Helen.

"No," returned Knurd. "I'm going to use them in a test. I've been trying to make an organic germ-culture more virulent than any known human disease. In case our other methods fail to subdue mankind, I'll loose this germ among them and bring them to terms."

The robot-body of Yorsky left.

Knurd glanced at Mason and Helen and then at several culture jars on his work table. Mason realized there wasn't much time. He had pretended unconsciousness up till now, but when Knurd's back was turned, he reached over and shook the girl. She had been sighing and twisting and he knew she was close to awakening.

Helen's eyes fluttered open. To be safe, Mason clapped his hand over her mouth and whispered rapidly in her ear, telling her to be quiet no matter how astonished she was at what she saw for the first time. The girl nodded, bravely checking her emotions as she looked around.

"We must get out of this room," Mason finished, "before Dr. Knurd decides to try some new culture on us. We'll try for the door."

He had already noticed, with beating pulses, that Yorsky had failed to close the wooden door tight when he left. Knurd's back was still turned. Mason quietly and quickly rose to his feet and helped the girl up. They both felt stiff and sore, and heavy-limbed. Mason figured that this must be because their normal weight was concentrated in their smaller bulk, at the expense of their muscular power.

Hugging the wall and tiptoeing, the two humans crept toward the door. The slight sounds they made were overshadowed by the low internal

humming of the robot's electrical machinery.

When they were within a dozen yards of the door, almost at the heels of the gigantic-seeming robot, Knurd turned around and took a few steps toward where they had lain. He stopped suddenly, seeing they were gone, and his odd cylindrical head twisted in search.

"Run for it!" shouted Mason, pushing the girl ahead. They reached the door. There was only a slight crack, too narrow for even their small bodies to squeeze through. Mason grabbed the edge with his hands and strained to pull the huge thick oaken door open. It failed to give and Mason redoubled his efforts, with Helen helping desperately.

Knurd had now discovered them. He gave a tinny shout and strode toward them. At the same time from the gaping eye-sockets of his head, a greenish glow stabbed and began to focus in their direction. Mason remembered the green glow at the ship —the paralysis-ray! The robot bodies were equipped with them and with God knew what other horrible forces supplied by their enigmatic internal apparatus.

WITH a desperate wrench, Mason swung the door open a few more inches and Helen stumbled through. Mason sprang after her and felt the tail-end of a numbing sensation. Just in time, or the paralysis-ray would have focused.

A long hall was revealed, as immense to them as a cathedral. Mason ran down the passageway, with an arm around the girl. Back of them the door they had quitted opened widely and Knurd's robot came out. He broke into a ponderous run, after them.

Mason realized they would be caught unless they found a door open somewhere. The stone hall ended abruptly further ahead. The robot, shouting, gained on them rapidly, with its longer stride. Then twin beams of reddish iridescence shot from the robots strange eye-sockets.

(Continued on page 124)

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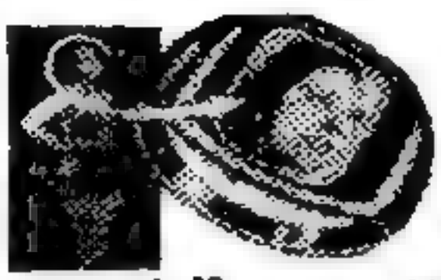

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(Continued from page 123)

Where they first focused, several feet ahead, Mason saw the stone smoke and chip. The heat-beam! Its touch would spell a horrible death!

"Here!" gasped Helen, jerking aside. "In here!"

A door was slightly ajar. They squeezed through. The large chamber seemed to be a storeroom. A half dozen robots were picking up crated objects and piling them neatly. They were menials and paid no attention to the two humans who stood in plain sight. There last command had been to stack the apparatus. No command had been given them about the humans.

But suddenly Knurd's roaring voice sounded as he came down the hall.

"Grab those two human's!" he was shouting. "Any menials who see them —catch them! If they try to escape, use the paralysis-ray or heat-beam."

Immediately, the menial-robots left their task and came for the two humans. The greenish glow of paralysis and the reddish of the heat-beam began to stab from all directions. Mason played a sudden hunch and ran straight for them, dragging the startled Helen along. All the beams focused over them safely. They darted between the clumsy legs of the slow-witted creatures and before they could turn around, had found temporary refuge behind the storeroom's piled-up contents.

Knurd's robot charged in, cursing at the menials for letting their prey escape. For a while it was a cat and mouse game, up and down the long aisles of the stacked merchandise. Because of their small size and the dim lighting, Mason and Helen were able to elude cornering by the clumsy menials, as they slipped around boxes and hugged shadows.

Mason had his automatic out, but realized it would be a puny weapon against the metal monsters. And now they were tiring rapidly. The robots could go on and on, tirelessly, but in this strenuous, game, Mason and Helen were reaching a limit of endurance.

They saw several doors, but all were tightly closed. Finally the inevitable

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happened and they were cornered. The menials and Dr. Knurd converged on them. The scientist's eyes radiated the paralysis-ray, and it began to focus in their direction. They were lost!

Mason made one futile shot with his automatic, aiming for one of Knurd's eyes. An instantaneous shutter clicked over the eye, and the bullet thudded harmlessly against metal. Knurd had developed the robot-bodies into remarkable engines of offense and defense.

Suddenly a door at their backs opened. A robot came out precipitately, shouting hoarsely. A large tube of something sailed over his head and smashed against the nearest wall. An oily solution splashed against the stone.

Mason did not stop to figure what it meant, but simply accepted fate's little finger and shoved the girl into the room beyond the door. He had seen there was only one menial-robot in there. Perhaps there was a chance of escaping him.

The door closed behind them. The menial-robot instantly came at them. It was a laboratory, but the benches behind which they might hide were at the other side of the room. They were cornered. The robot loomed up monstrously, and extended its steely hands.

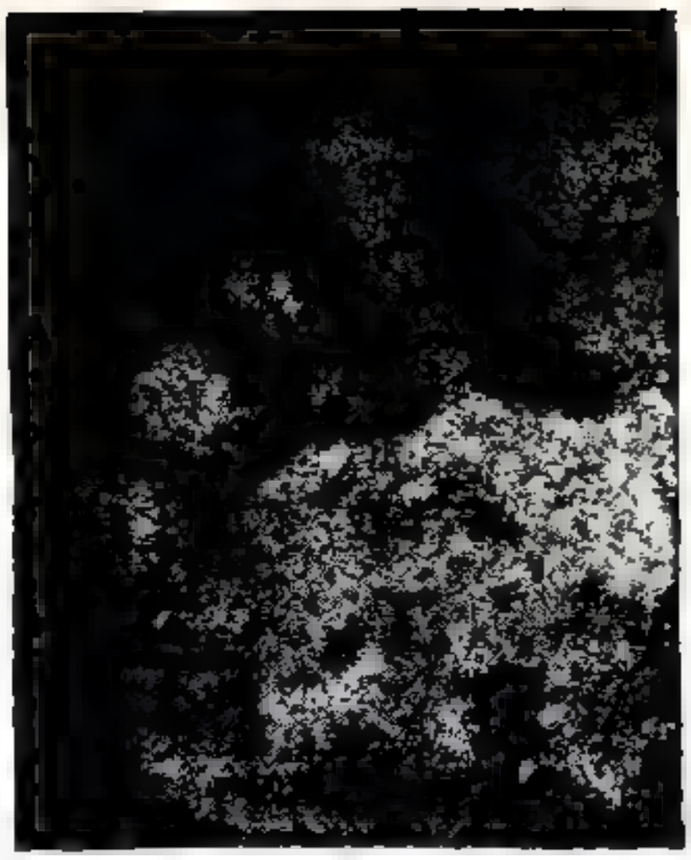
Cursing, Mason fired his automatic wildly. The bullets spanged harmessly against metal. Then the green paralysis-ray shot from the creature's eyes and Mason felt his limbs go rubbery. Helen collapsed on the floor at his side.

Caught at last! Mason's last thoughts were bitter as the paralysis bit into his brain.

SENSING that he had been out for many hours, Mason opened his eyes to find his vision obstructed by something shimmering. Puzzled, he looked out at a distorted view. Then he saw Helen a few feet away, standing upright in what was simply a bell-jar. Mason realized that he, too, was inclosed in one.

It suddenly struck Mason forcibly

(Continued on page 126)



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10c AT ALL STANDS

(Continued from page 125)

just how small they were. Here they were, two grown human beings, standing upright in ordinary laboratory bell-jars, and unable to reach the tops! But what did it mean? Was Knurd, perhaps, about to test his germ culture on them?

Blind fear of being thus inclosed like a guinea-pig struck Mason and he kicked at the prison wall of glass-like material. He could see Helen, just a few feet away, pounding with her little fists against her crystalline prison. Hysterical panic was in her face. Her mouth was open, as though she were screaming, but Mason couldn't hear a sound.

Rage now ripped Mason's tattered nerves. Rage that the girl he loved must suffer these cruelties at the hands of monsters of metal. He fired the last remaining shots of his automatic at the bell-jar wall. It was not glass. It did not break. The confined reverberations nearly threw him off his feet.

He looked up now to see the menial-robot who had captured them looming over the jars. The red heat-beam came in a twin stream from its cryptic eyes and focused on the glass. A line of flame traveled down the rounded surface and split the jar open like a pod. Metallic hands that did not know feeling grasped the molten material and shoved it aside.

Then Helen's transparent prison was similarly treated. Soon Mason and Helen were free and leaped for one another's arms. The menial robot seemed to stare down at them benignly. Then it sank to the floor, with a peculiarly soft thud, as though the metal had turned to putty.

"Helen . . . Don . . ." it called tinnily.

Mason and Helen stared down from the table-top at the fallen robot.

"Dr. Montry!" cried Mason in sudden realization.

"Yes, it's I!" came the metallic tones of the robot.

"But you're a menial, how could you —"

"I wasn't a menial," returned Dr. Montry. "The skillful Dr. Yorsky

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made the one mistake of his life. He was too hasty. He failed to short-circuit my cortex. I played dumb, waited my chance. You must escape—and quickly! Follow corridor past Knurd's laboratory, turn right—leads to open air. The yacht wasn't wrecked—beached there—hurry!"

"But you, Dr. Montry—" began Mason.

"I'm doomed," pronounced the robot. "But so are all the other robots in this cavern of evil. When I opened the door to let you in, I threw out Harkman's metallic germ-culture. They have spread through the caverns and attacked all metals, turning them into rotting oxides like a mold putrifies organic matter. I put you two under bell-jars as the germs attack human lungs too. But by now the air is fairly clear of them. Hurry and escape before the caverns collapse on your heads. All the steel beams and bracing rods have been attacked. They'll buckle any minute!"

"But our size!" stammered Mason. "We're little pygmies—"

"No, you aren't!" snapped back Dr. Montry's robot. "You're normal size, always have been. Relatively, you're small, yes, because everything in this place is *over*-sized. Dr. Knurd had to make his robots big in order to fit into them all the apparatus necessary. Therefore, all else, including the instruments, had to be in proportion."

The robot-body squirmed and parts of it sloughed away as though it were diseased flesh.

"Good-by—hurry—" Said the scientist. Then the cylindrical head cracked away from the torso. A moment later the metal fell in on itself to reveal something nakedly pinkish in a glass-like container.

Mason smashed the object with his pistol-butt, with closed eyes, knowing he was doing a good thing, and leaped away. Helen was sobbing as he relentlessly dragged her into a run . . .

An hour later from the height of the cliff in the bowels of which Dr. Knurd had dug his incredible headquarters, they watched as the massive rock roof fell in, burying its secret forever.

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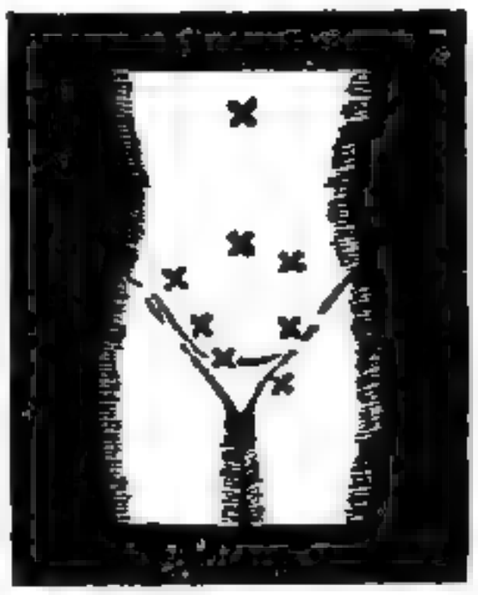

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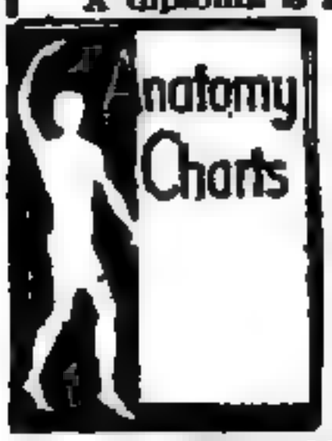

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(Continued from page 116)

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ANOTHER VOTE
By SEYMOUR KAPETANSKY

Yes, put me down for a quarterly, or a thirdly, or a semi-annual, or an annual. A great big College Humor size THRILLING WONDER STORIES with yarns by science fiction's ace writers, Keller, the Binders, Smith, Coblentz, Williamson, and the others who are consistently good. A nice big science fiction magazine—is it to come? I hope so!—1524 Taylor, Detriot, Michigan.

SAYING IT WITH VERSE
By GRACE KOBELL

THRILLING WONDER with me rings the bell
A companion to it would be swell.
I'd read every one—
I bet they'd be fun—
The mag would be easy to sell!

Barnes, Binder, and Ernst sure are fine
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—126 W. 169th St., New York City.

WANTS NOVELS
By CHARLES WARD

Here is my vote for a companion magazine to THRILLING WONDER STORIES, containing full-length novels. The best stories you or your predecessors ever had were the serials and long novels. Ordinary short stories do not provide one an opportunity to become acquainted with the characters.

The longer stories would, I am certain, attract many new readers. Once the new magazine comes out—and I am sure it will—it is up to the readers to spread the word to their friends.—Los Angeles, Calif.

A BURROUGHS FAN
By WILLIAM NOVAK

Put me down as being very much in favor of a companion magazine to T.W.S. I like the suggestion of W. C. Scheible of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, regarding longer stories in the new magazine. Also, how about reviving the old Mars series of stories written several years ago by Edgar Rice Burroughs? Although not as scientifically accurate as

BEST FUN, FICTION AND FOTOS IN

they should be, they are extremely interesting and I, for one, would very much enjoy reading them again. How about some more Penton & Blake stories?—314 Nelson Ave., Saratoga Springs, N. Y.

SHORT AND SWEET

I want a new science fiction magazine. —C. L. Cottrell, 27 Drummond Ave., Red Bank, N. J.

How about a companion magazine to T. W. S.?—G. Aylesworth, Mackinaw City, Michigan.

Another vote in favor of a sixthly companion to T. W. S.—R. D. Swisher, Winchester, Mass.

I would like to have a new science fiction magazine.—T. M. Strane, Elmhurst, Ill.

Me too.—Dominick Passante, North Bergen, N. J.

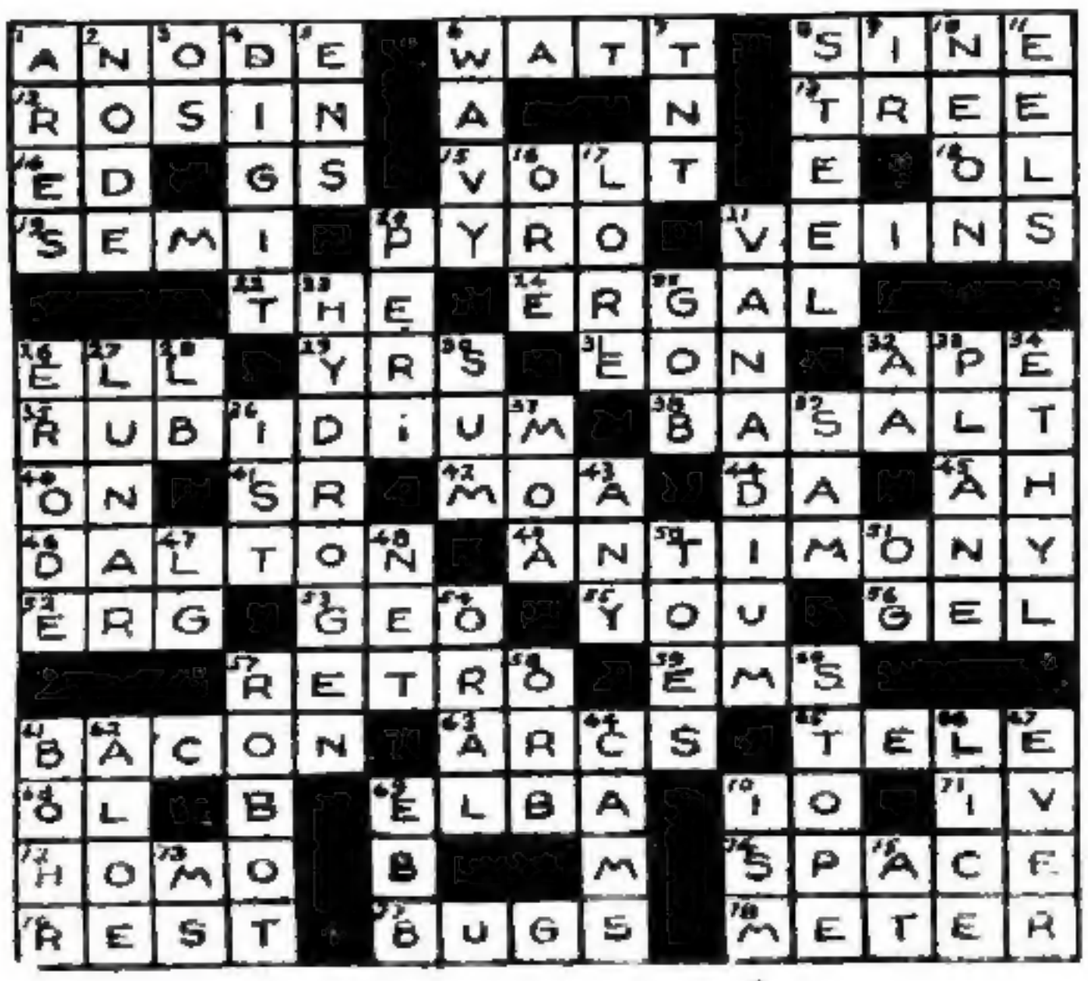
Count me in on the new mag.—David Charney, 150 Haven Ave., N. Y. C.

I want a new science fiction magazine. —W. S. Macfarlane, Jr., Mt. Vernon, N. Y.

Please enter my request for the new science fiction magazine.—R. E. Blackwelder, Gulfport, Miss.

I'm waiting.—Peter Dresden, Keansburg, N. J.

SOLUTION OF CROSS-WORD PUZZLE ON PAGE 118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29x5.00-19	2.45	1.35
30x5.00-20	2.65	1.25
5.25-17	2.80	1.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
5.50-17	2.75	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45
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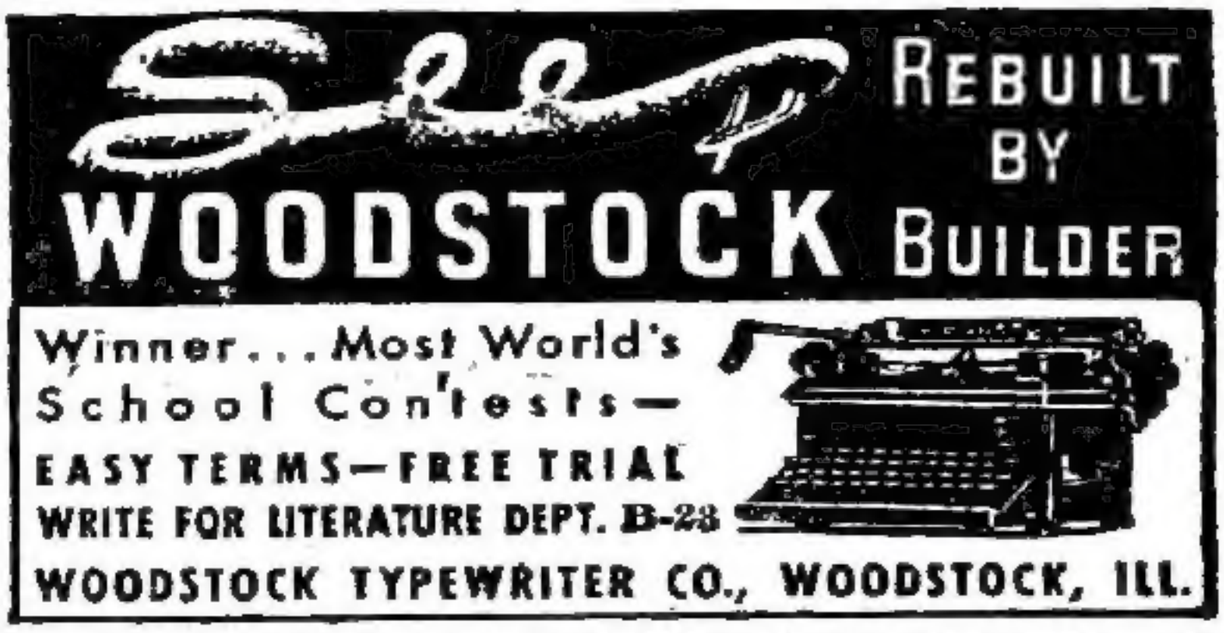

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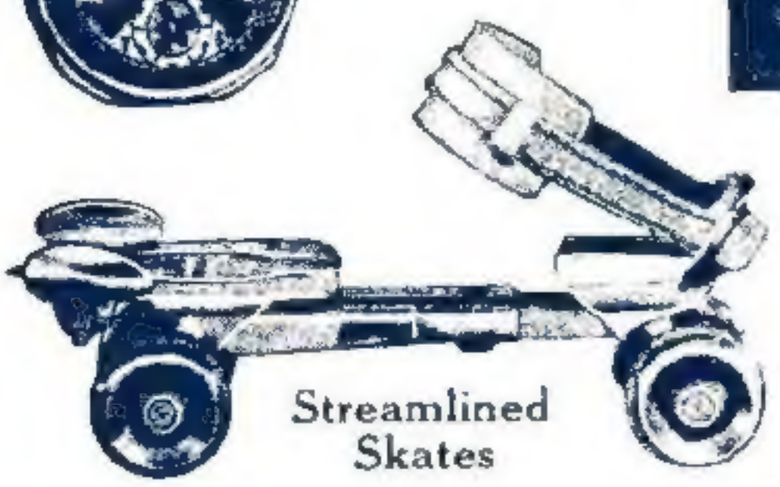

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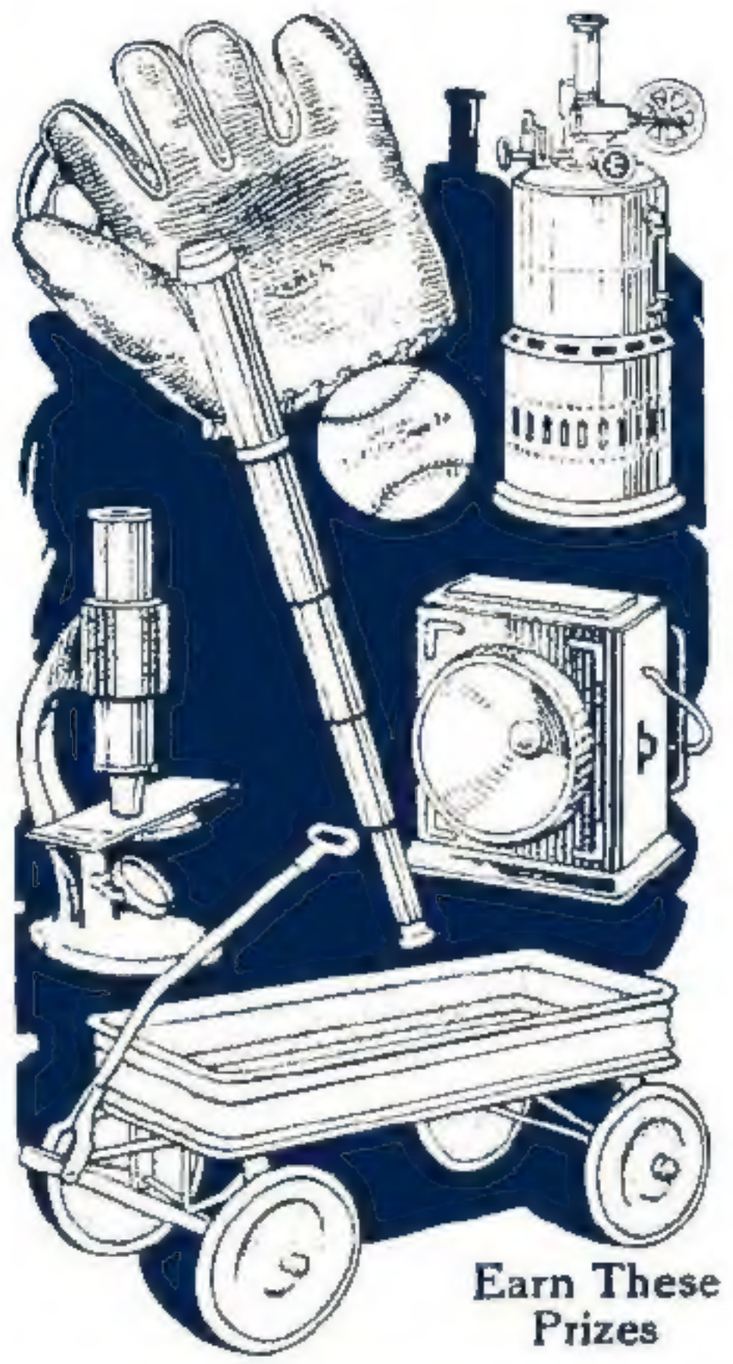

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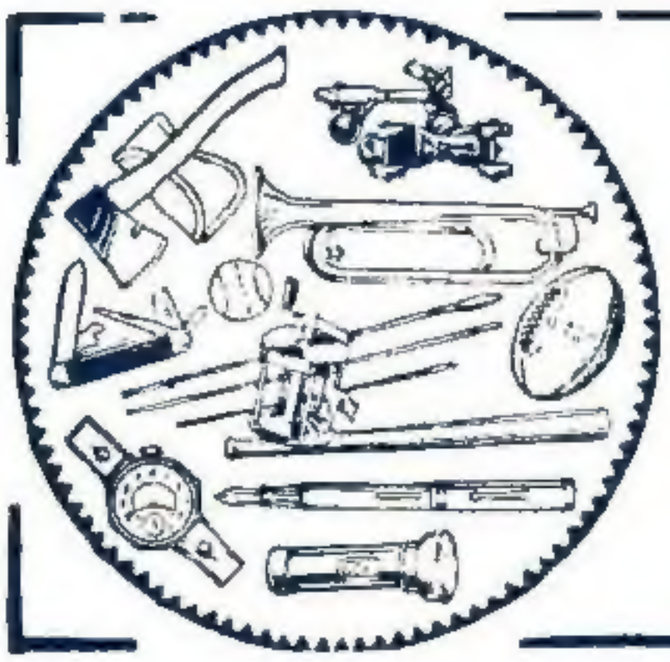

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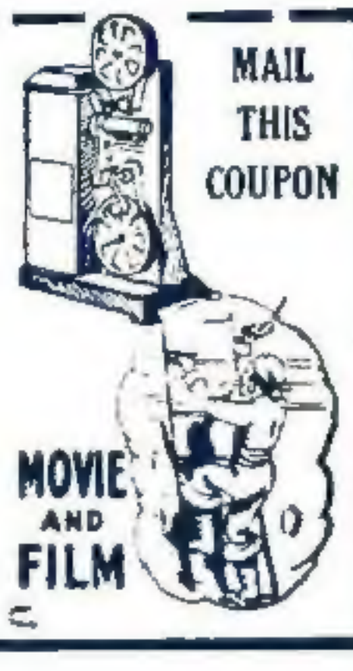
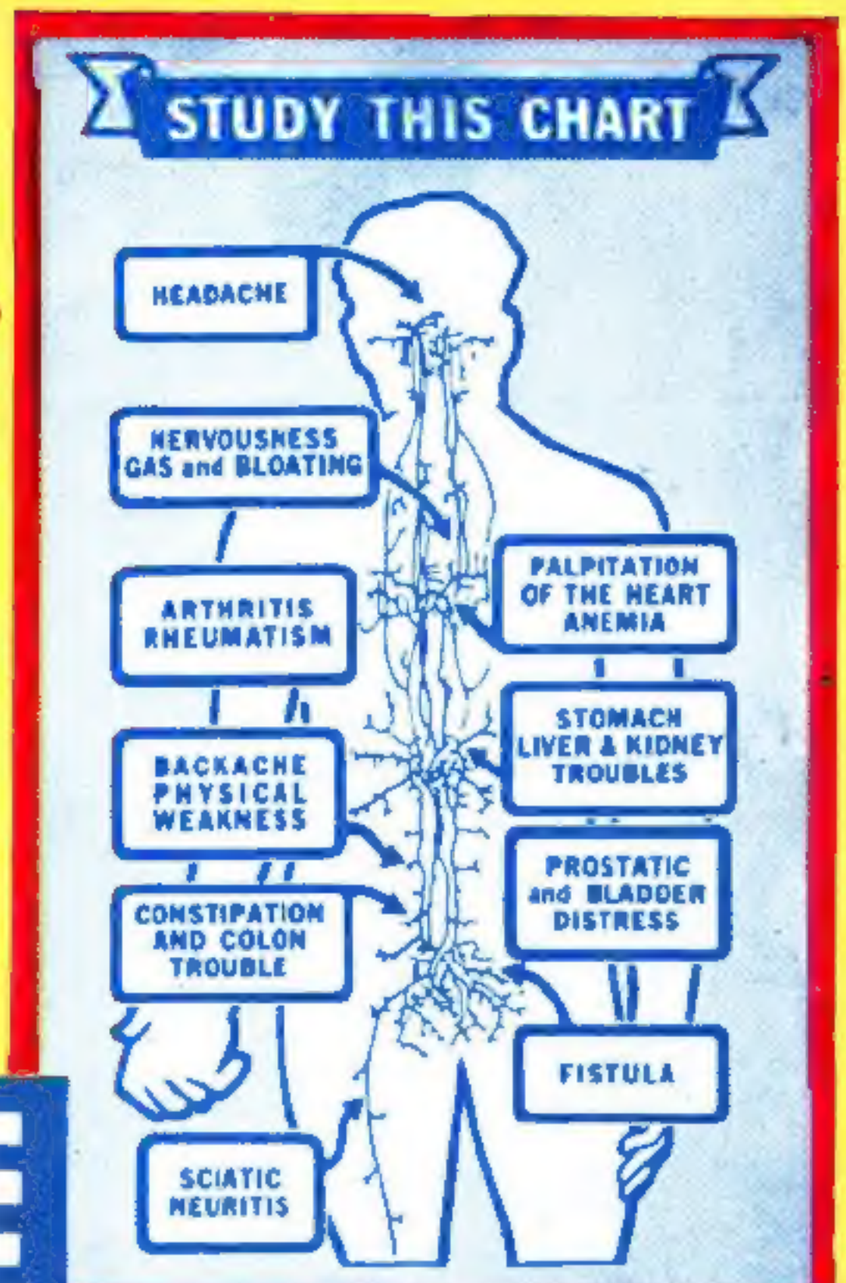


YOUR PILES may be

associated with any of these ailments



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